

ROUSSEAU

*Discours sur l'origine et
les fondements de
l'inégalité parmi les
hommes*



C. Lefèvre del.

D. Sommier sculp.

Il retourne chez ses Egaux.

Voyez la Note 13. p. 259.

JEAN JACQUES ROUSSEAU
DISCOURSE ON THE ORIGIN
AND THE FOUNDATIONS
OF INEQUALITY AMONG MEN

Translated
by
Ian Johnston

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

In the following text there are two sorts of notes, those provided by Rousseau, which are indicated in the text by a phrase in brackets (e.g., Note 1) and placed at the end of the main text, and those provided by the translator, which appear as footnotes. Rousseau himself recommends that the reader ignore his notes until after completing the entire text.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) wrote his *Discourse on Inequality* (also called the *Second Discourse*) as an entry in a competition organized by the Academy of Dijon in 1754. He had won first prize in a previous competition (in 1750) with his *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts* (the *First Discourse*), a victory which had helped to make him famous. *The Second Discourse* did not fare so well in the contest. The Second Discourse was published in 1755.

When the *Second Discourse* was published again in 1782, Rousseau inserted a few short additions into the text. These are included in the main text here and are indicated by square brackets: e.g., [Text added in the 1782 edition].

DISCOURSE ON THE ORIGIN AND THE FOUNDATIONS
OF INEQUALITY AMONG MEN

by

Jean-Jacques Rousseau
Citizen of Geneva

*We ought to think about what is natural not in things which are corrupt but in things which are well ordered by nature.*¹

To the Republic of Geneva
Magnificent, Most Honored, and Sovereign Lords²

Convinced that only the virtuous citizen may give his homeland honours which it can acknowledge, I have been working for thirty years to become worthy of offering you a public homage, and since this happy occasion makes up in part for what my efforts have not been able to accomplish, I believed that I would be permitted here to follow the zeal which inspires me more than the right which ought to act as my authorization. Having had the good fortune to be born among you, how could I reflect on the equality which nature has established among men and on the inequality which they have instituted, without thinking about the profound wisdom with which both of these, happily combined in this state, contribute in a manner most closely approaching natural law and most favorable to society for maintaining public order and the happiness of individuals? As I was investigating the best principles which good sense could set down concerning the constitution of a government, I was so struck by seeing them all at work in yours that, even if I had not been born within your walls, I do not think I would have been able to forego offering this picture of human society to those who, among all peoples, seem to me to possess its greatest advantages and to have best averted its abuses.

¹The Latin epigraph reads: “*Non in depravatis, sed in his quae bene secundum naturam se habent, considerandum est quid sit naturale.*”

²The “Lords” Rousseau is addressing repeatedly in this first part may be the leading members in the city council or the citizens of Geneva collectively.

If I had had to choose the place where I was born, I would have selected a society whose size was limited by the extent of human faculties, that is to say, by the possibility of being well governed, and where each man was competent in his work, so that no one would be compelled to delegate to others the functions to which he was assigned, a state where, because all the individuals knew each other, neither the obscure maneuvers of vice nor the modesty of virtue would be able to escape the view and judgment of the public, and where this sweet habit of seeing and knowing each other made the love of one's homeland the love of the citizens rather than the love of the land.

I would have wanted to be born in a country where the sovereign and the people could have only one and the same interest, so that all the movements of the machine would tend to nothing but the common happiness. Since that would not be possible unless the people and the sovereign were the same person, it follows that I would have wished to be born under a democratic government, wisely tempered.

I would have wanted to live and die free, that is to say, sufficiently subject to laws so that neither I nor anyone else would be able to shake off their honorable yoke, that salutary and mild yoke which the proudest heads carry all the more obediently because they are created to carry no other.

Thus, I would have wished that no one in the state could assert that he was above the law and that no one outside of it would be able to impose any law that the state was obligated to recognize. For no matter what the constitution of a government may be, if there is a single man who is not subject to the law, all the others are necessarily at his discretion (Note 1). And if there is a national leader and another foreign leader, no matter how they may divide up authority, it is impossible for both of them to be properly obeyed and for the state to be well governed.

I would not have wanted to live in a newly established republic, however good the laws it might have, for fear that, since the government might perhaps be set up in a way different from what would be necessary at the time and so would not be suitable for the new citizens or the citizens for the new government, the state might be subject to being undermined and destroyed almost from the moment of its birth. For with liberty it is like those solid and delicious foods or those rich wines that are appropriate for nourishing and strengthening robust temperaments accustomed to them but that overwhelm, ruin, and intoxicate the weak and delicate ones not made for them. Once people have grown accustomed to masters, they are no longer capable of doing without them. If they attempt to shake off the yoke, they distance themselves even further from liberty, because they confuse it with an unrestrained license, which is its opposite, and so their revolutions almost always deliver them over to seducers, who merely make their chains worse. Even the Roman people, that model of all free peoples, was in no a condition to govern itself when it came out from under the oppression of the Tarquins. Debased by the slavery and the ignominious work the Tarquins had imposed on it, at first it was only a stupid population, which had to be managed and governed with the greatest wisdom, so that, as it gradually grew accustomed to breathe the healthy air of liberty, these souls, enervated or rather stupefied under tyranny, by degrees acquired that strictness of morality and courageous pride that finally made them the most respected of all peoples.³ Hence, I would have sought out for my homeland a happy and peaceful republic whose antiquity was in a way lost in the night of time, that had gone through only those troubles suitable for demonstrating and reinforcing among its inhabitants a courage and a love of homeland and in which the citizens, long accustomed to a wise independence, were not only free but worthy of being free.

I would have wanted to choose for myself a homeland whose fortunate lack of power made it turn away from a ferocious love of conquests, and which was protected by a location even more fortunate from the fear of itself becoming

³In Rome's very early history the citizens were ruled by an Etruscan clan called the Tarquins.

the conquest of another state; a free city situated among several peoples, none of whom had an interest in invading it and each with an interest in preventing others from doing so themselves, a republic, in short, which did not tempt the ambition of its neighbours and which could reasonably count on their assistance in times of need. In such a happy situation it follows that it would have had nothing to fear except itself and that, if its citizens were trained in using weapons, this would be to maintain among them that warrior spirit and that courageous pride which are so well suited to liberty and which nourish the taste for it, rather than from the need to provide their own defense.

I would have searched for a country where the legislative right was common to all the citizens. For who can understand better than they the conditions under which it is appropriate for them to live together in the same society? But I would not have approved of plebiscites like those among the Romans, where the leaders of the state and those most interested in its preservation were excluded from the deliberations on which its security frequently depended and where, by an absurd inconsistency, the magistrates were deprived of rights that simple citizens enjoyed.

On the contrary, in order to stop self-interested and badly conceived projects and the dangerous innovations that finally ruined the Athenians, I would have desired that no one man had the power to propose new laws according to his fancy; that this right belonged only to the magistrates and that even they used it with such circumspection that the people, for its part, would be reluctant to give its consent to these laws, and that their promulgation could be carried out only with so much solemnity, that before the constitution was undermined the citizens would have had the time to realize that it was above all the great antiquity of the laws which made them sacred and venerable, that the people soon grows contemptuous of laws that it sees changing every day, and that, by growing used to neglecting ancient customs under the pretext of doing better, people often introduce great evils in order to correct lesser ones.

Above all, on the grounds that it must be badly governed, I would have run away from a republic where the people believed they could dispense with their magistrates or leave them with only a precarious authority and so would have imprudently kept control of the administration of civil matters and the execution of their own laws. Such must have been the rudimentary constitution of the first governments which emerged immediately from the state of nature, and such was also one of the vices that ruined the republic of Athens.

But I would have chosen a country where the individuals were content with giving their sanction to the laws, and, deciding as a collective body and on the basis of a report from their leaders the most important public issues, established respected tribunals, distinguished with care their various departments, and elected year by year the most capable and most honest of their fellow citizens to administer justice and govern the state. The virtue of the magistrates in this way would bear witness to the wisdom of the people, so that they both mutually honored each other. Thus, if ever some fatal misunderstandings happened to trouble public concord, even these times of blindness and errors would be characterized by evidence of moderation, reciprocal esteem, and a common respect for the laws, harbingers and guarantees of a sincere and permanent reconciliation.

Such are, Magnificent, Most Honoured, and Sovereign Lords, the advantages I would have looked for in the homeland I would have chosen for myself. And if providence had added to these a charming location, a temperate climate, a fertile countryside, and the most delightful appearance under heaven, then to complete my happiness, I would have desired only to enjoy all these benefits in the bosom of this happy homeland, living peacefully in a sweet society with my fellow citizens, practicing towards them, following their example, humanity, friendship, and all the virtues, and leaving after me the honorable memory of a good man and an honest and virtuous patriot.

If, less happy or wise too late, I had seen myself reduced to ending an unhealthy and languishing career in other climates, vainly regretting the peace and quiet which my imprudent youth had taken away from me, I would at least have nourished in my soul these same feelings which I could not have put to use in my own country, and, filled with a tender and disinterested affection for my distant fellow citizens, I would have delivered to them from the depths of my heart something close to the following address.

My dear fellow citizens, or rather my brothers, since the ties of blood as well as the laws unite almost all of us, it is sweet for me to be unable to think of you without at the same time thinking of all the goods which you enjoy, whose value none of you perhaps feels better than I, who have lost them. The more I reflect on your political and civil situation, the less I can imagine that the nature of human affairs could include a better one. In all other governments, when it is a question of securing the greatest good for the state, everything is always limited to abstract projects, at most to simple possibilities. For you, your happiness is complete. All you have to do is enjoy it. To become perfectly happy, you have no further need other than to know how to content yourselves with being so. Your sovereignty, acquired or recovered by the point of a sword and preserved for two centuries through merit and wisdom, is finally recognized fully and universally. Honorable treaties determine your boundaries, assure your rights, and strengthen your repose. Your constitution is excellent, set down by the most sublime reason and protected by friendly and respected powers. Your state is tranquil: you have neither wars nor conquerors to fear. You have no masters, other than the wise laws you have made, administered by magistrates with integrity, whom you have chosen. You are neither rich enough to become enervated by softness, and with vain delights to lose the taste for genuine happiness and solid virtues—nor so poor that you need more help from foreigners than your industry procures for you. And this precious liberty, which in great nations is maintained only with exorbitant taxation, costs you almost nothing to preserve.

May a republic so wisely and so happily constituted last eternally for the happiness of its citizens and as an example to other peoples! This is the only wish that remains for you to make and the only care left for you to take. From now on it is up to you alone, not to create your happiness, for your ancestors have spared you that trouble, but to make it durable by the wisdom of using it well. Your preservation depends upon your perpetual union, your obedience to the laws, and your respect for their ministers. If there remains among you the least germ of acrimony or mistrust, hurry to destroy it as a deadly leaven that sooner or later would bring you misfortune and the ruin of the state. I entreat you all to go back deep into your hearts and to consult the secret voice of your conscience. Does anyone among you know in the universe a body more honest, more enlightened, and more respectable than your Magistrates? All of its members offer you examples of moderation, simplicity of morals, respect for the laws, and the most sincere reconciliation. So without any reservations, render to such wise leaders that healthy confidence which reason owes to virtue. Consider the fact that they are your choice, that they justify that choice, and that the honours due to those whom you have dignified necessarily reflect back on you yourselves. None of you is so little enlightened that he does not know that where the vigour of the laws and the authority of their defenders cease, there can be neither security nor liberty for anyone. Then what is of concern among you other than to carry out with a good heart and a just confidence what you would always be obliged to do by true interest, by duty, and for the sake of reason? Do not let a culpable and fatal indifference to the maintenance of the constitution ever make you neglect, in time of need, the wise counsels of the most enlightened and the most zealous among you. But may equity, moderation, and the most respectful firmness continue to regulate every step you take and to manifest in you to the entire universe the example of a proud and modest people, as jealous of its glory as of its liberty. Take care above all—and this will be my last piece of advice—never to listen to sinister interpretations and poisonous speeches, whose secret motives are often more dangerous than the actions they are proposing. An entire house wakes up and responds with alarm to the first cries of a good and faithful guardian who never barks except at the approach of thieves, but we

hate the importunity of those noisy animals whose barking never ceases to disturb the public peace and whose constant and inappropriate warnings are not listened to, even at a time when they are needed.

And you, Magnificent and Most Honoured Lords, you worthy and respectable magistrates of a free people, allow me to offer my homage and my respects to you in particular. If there is in the world a rank suited to conferring renown upon those who hold it, it is undoubtedly the one that talents and virtue confer, the one of which you have made yourselves worthy, and to which your fellow citizens have raised you. Their own merit adds to yours still a new luster, and, selected by men capable of governing others so that they are governed themselves, I find you as superior to other magistrates as a free people, above all the one you have the honour of leading, is superior to the population of other states, thanks to its enlightenment and its reason.

Allow me to cite an example for which better records should remain and which will always be present in my heart. I cannot recall without the sweetest emotion the memory of that virtuous citizen to whom I owe my life and who in my childhood often spoke of the respect that was due to you. I see him still, living from the work of his hands and feeding his soul with the most sublime truths. In front of him I see Tacitus, Plutarch, and Grotius, mixed in with the instruments of his trade. I see at his side a beloved son receiving with too little profit the gentle instruction of the best of fathers.⁴ But if the strayings of a foolish youth made me forget for a while such wise lessons, I have the happiness of feeling at last that, no matter what tendency one has towards vice, it is difficult for an education in which the heart is involved to remain lost forever.

Such are, Magnificent and Most Honorable Lords, the citizens and even the ordinary inhabitants born in the state you govern. Such are those educated

⁴Tacitus was a Roman historian, Plutarch a very famous Greek biographer (of great men), and Grotius (1583-1645) an influential Dutch writer on law. Rousseau's father, a watchmaker, was an educated man.

and sensible men, about whom, under the name of workers and the people, those in other nations have such low and false ideas. My father, I affirm with joy, was not distinguished among his fellow citizens. He was only what they all are, and given the kind of man he was, there is no country where his society would not have been sought out and cultivated, and even to their advantage, among the most respectable people. It is not appropriate for me and, thank heaven, it is not necessary to speak to you about the esteem which can be expected from you for men of that quality, your equals in education as well as by the rights of nature and of birth, your inferiors by their own will, by the preference which they owe and have accorded to your merit, something for which you in turn owe them some sort of acknowledgement. I learn with a lively satisfaction how much your gentleness and condescension temper for them the solemnity which befits ministers of the laws, how much you repay them with your regard and attention for what they owe you in obedience and respect, behaviour full of justice and wisdom, appropriate for distancing more and more the memory of the unfortunate events which it is necessary to forget in order that they are never seen again; conduct all the more judicious since this equitable and generous people makes a pleasure of its duty, and naturally loves to honour you, and since those keenest to maintain their rights are the ones most inclined to respect yours.⁵

It should not be surprising that the leaders of a civil society love its glory and its happiness. But it is too surprising for the peace of men's minds to expect that those who think of themselves as magistrates, or rather as masters, of a holier and more sublime homeland, manifest some love for the earthly homeland which nourishes them. How sweet it is for me to be able to make such a rare exception in our favour and to place among the ranks of our best citizens these zealous men, trustees of sacred doctrines authorized by the laws, those venerable ministers of souls, whose lively and sweet eloquence carries

⁵The phrase “unfortunate events,” like the earlier “fatal misunderstanding” Rousseau talks about, refers to an ongoing conflict between the leading magistrates and the legislative body in Geneva at various times throughout the eighteenth century. These had been apparently resolved by the time Rousseau was writing, but disputes flared up again in the 1760's and 1780's.

the Gospel maxims into the heart all the better because they always begin by practicing them themselves! The whole world knows with what success the great art of the pulpit is cultivated in Geneva. But, too accustomed to perceiving things said one way and done another, few people know how far the spirit of Christianity, the sanctity of morals, the strictness towards themselves, and the gentleness toward others prevail among our ministers. Perhaps it is up to the city of Geneva alone to demonstrate the edifying example of such a perfect union between a society of theologians and men of letters. I base my hope for the permanent tranquilly of the state in large part on their wisdom, their acknowledged moderation, and their zeal for its prosperity, and I observe with a pleasure mingled with astonishment and respect how much they are horrified by the dreadful maxims of those holy and barbarous men, of whom history provides more than one example, who, to maintain the so-called rights of God, that is to say, their interests, were all the less averse to shedding human blood because they flattered themselves that theirs would always be respected.

Could I forget that precious half of the republic that creates the happiness of the other half, and whose sweetness and wisdom maintain peace and good morals within it? Amiable and virtuous female citizens, the lot of your sex will always be to govern ours. What happiness when your chaste power, exercised solely within the conjugal union, makes itself felt only for the glory of the state and public well being! That is how women used to command in Sparta, and that is how you deserve to command in Geneva. What barbarous man could resist the voice of honour and of reason in the mouth of a tender wife? Who would not scorn vain luxury at the sight of your simple and modest dress which, through the brilliance it acquires from you, seems to be most favorable to beauty? It is up to you always to maintain by your amiable and innocent sway and your captivating spirit the love of the laws in the state and harmony among the citizens, to reunite divided families with happy marriages, and, above all, to correct by the persuasive sweetness of your lessons and by the modest graces of your conversation the errant ways that our young people happen to pick up in other countries; from where, instead of so many useful

things from which they could profit, they bring back, with a puerile tone and ridiculous airs acquired among lost women, nothing but an admiration for who knows what kind of would-be grandeur, frivolous compensations for their servitude, which will never be worth august liberty. So always be what you are, the chaste guardians of morals and the mild restraints of peace, and continue to put to good use on every occasion the rights of the heart and of nature for the benefit of duty and virtue.

I flatter myself that, in basing my hope for the general happiness of the citizens and for the glory of the republic on such guarantees, I will not be proved wrong by events. I confess that with all these advantages it will not shine with that brilliance which dazzles most eyes and for which the childish and fatal taste is the most deadly enemy of happiness and liberty. Let the dissolute young go elsewhere to seek easy pleasures and long repentance. Let the so-called people of taste admire in other places the grandeur of palaces, the beauty of carriages, the superb furnishings, the pomp of spectacles, and all the refinements of soft living and luxury. In Geneva, one will find only men, but a sight of this kind nevertheless has a real value of its own, and those who seek it out are well worth the admirers of the rest.

Magnificent, Most Honoured, and Sovereign Lords, may you all deign to receive with the same kindness the respectful testimonies of the interest that I take in your communal prosperity. If in this lively outpouring of my heart I have been so unfortunate as to be guilty of some indiscreet transport, I beg you to pardon that as the tender affection of a true patriot and the ardent and legitimate zeal of a man who considers that there is no greater happiness for him than that of seeing you all happy.

I am, with the most profound respect,
Magnificent, Most Honored and Sovereign Lords,
Your very humble and very obedient servant and fellow citizen

Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

Chambery, 12 June 1754.

PREFACE

The most useful and the least advanced of all areas of human knowledge seems to me to be that of man (Note 2), and I venture to say that the inscription on the temple at Delphi by itself contained a precept more important and more difficult than all the bulky volumes of the moralists.⁶ Thus, I consider the subject of this Discourse one of the most interesting questions philosophy could propose, and, unfortunately for us, one of the thorniest that philosophers could resolve. For how are we to know the source of inequality among men, if we do not begin by understanding men themselves? And how will man succeed in seeing himself the way nature made him, through all the changes which the succession of time and things must have produced in his original constitution, and in disentangling what he retains of his own fundamental core from the things that circumstances and his progress have added to or changed in his primitive state? Like the statue of Glaucus, which time, the sea, and storms have so disfigured that it looks less like a god than a ferocious beast, so the human soul, altered in the bosom of society by a thousand causes constantly renewed, by the acquisition of huge amounts of knowledge and errors, by the changes which have taken place in the constitution of the body, and by the constant shock of the passions, has, so to speak, changed its appearance to the point where it is almost impossible to recognize. And in the place of a being always acting according to certain and invariable principles, in the place of that divine and majestic simplicity which its Author impressed upon it, we no longer discover anything there but the warped contrast between passion that believes it is reasoning and a delirious understanding.

What is even crueller is that all the progress in the human species constantly takes it further away from its primitive state. The more we accumulate new

⁶The inscription (in Greek) reads “Know thyself.”

kinds of knowledge, the more we deprive ourselves of the means of acquiring the most important knowledge of all, and, in a sense, it is thanks to the study of man that we are now beyond the condition where we can know him.

It is easy to see that it is in these successive changes in the human constitution that we must look for the first origin of the differences which separate men, who, by general opinion, are naturally as equal among themselves as were the animals of each species before various physical causes introduced into some of them the varieties we notice there. In fact, it is inconceivable that these first changes, however they came about, altered all at once and in the same way all the individuals of the species. But while some were improved or weakened and acquired various good or bad qualities not inherent in their nature, others remained for a longer period in their original state; such was the first source of inequality among men, a fact which it is thus easier to demonstrate in general than to precisely assign its real causes.

Let my readers not imagine, therefore, that I dare flatter myself for having seen something that appears to me so difficult to see. I have begun some rational lines of enquiry and hazarded some assumptions, less in the hope of resolving the question than with the intention of illuminating it and reducing it to its true state. Other people will readily be able to go further along the same route, although it will not be easy for anyone to reach the end. For it is no slight undertaking to disentangle what is original from what is artificial in the present nature of man and to understand well a state which no longer exists, which perhaps never existed, which probably never will exist, and concerning which it is nevertheless necessary to have some accurate notions in order to judge properly our present state. Someone who would endeavor to determine exactly what precautions he should take in order to make some reliable observations on this subject would require even more philosophy than one might think, and a good solution to the following problem would seem to me not unworthy of the Aristotles and Plinys of our age: *What experiments would be necessary to reach an understanding of natural man, and what are the ways of making these experiments in the bosom of society?* Far from

attempting to resolve this problem, I believe I have meditated sufficiently on the subject to venture to respond in advance that the greatest philosophers will not be too good to direct these experiments, nor the most powerful sovereigns to undertake them. It is hardly reasonable to expect such cooperation, above all with the perseverance or rather the continuing enlightenment and goodwill necessary on both sides to attain success.

This research, so difficult to carry out, and we have thought about it so little up to this point, is nonetheless the only means left to us of removing a multitude of difficulties which hide from us the knowledge of the real foundations of human society. It is this ignorance of the nature of man that throws so much uncertainty and obscurity onto the true definition of natural right. For the idea of right, says Mr. Burlamaqui, and even more the idea of natural right, are manifestly ideas relative to the nature of man.⁷ Hence, it is from this very nature of man, he continues, his constitution and his condition, from which we must deduce the principles of this science.

It is not without surprise and scandal that one observes how little agreement prevails on this important matter among the various authors who have dealt with it. Among the most serious writers there are hardly two who agree about it. Without mentioning the ancient philosophers, who seem to have gone to great trouble to contradict each other on the most basic principles, the Roman jurists subject man and all the other animals indiscriminately to the same natural law, because under this name they considered the law nature imposes on herself rather than the one she prescribes; or rather, because these jurists understood the word *law* in a particular sense, on this occasion they seem to have accepted it only as the expression of general relationships established by nature among all animated beings for their common preservation. The moderns, understanding under the term law only a rule prescribed to a moral being, that is to say, to one that is intelligent, free, and deliberate in its relationships with other beings, consequently limit the jurisdiction of natural

⁷Jean Jacques Burlamaqui (1694–1748) was Swiss jurist and writer on natural law.

law to the single animal endowed with reason, that is, to man. However, each of them defines this law in his own way; they all establish it on such metaphysical principles that there are, even among us, very few people in a position to understand these principles, let alone capable of finding them by themselves. As a result, all the definitions of these scholarly men, in other respects constantly contradicting each other, agree only on one point: that it is impossible to understand the law of nature, and hence to obey it, without being a very great reasoner and a profound metaphysician. And that indicates precisely that, for the establishment of society, men must have employed an enlightenment that develops only with a great deal of effort and in very few people, even within the bosom of society itself.

Since we have such a meager understanding of nature and there is such poor agreement about the meaning of the word *law*, it would be very difficult to agree on a good definition of natural law. All those we find in books, aside from the problem that they are not the same, have the additional fault of being derived from several kinds of knowledge which men do not possess naturally and from advantages of which they can have no idea until after they have left the state of nature. These writers begin by investigating the rules about which, for the sake of common utility, it would be appropriate for men to agree on among themselves, and then they assign the name natural law to the collection of these rules, without any other proof aside from the benefit which they find would result from their universal practice. That is surely a very convenient way to come up with definitions and to explain the nature of things with almost arbitrary reasons.

But so long as we do not know natural man, it is useless for us to want to determine the law he has received or the one which best fits his constitution. All we can see very clearly on the subject of this law is that, in order for it to be a law, it is necessary not only that the will of the man with an obligation to it is capable of submitting to it knowingly, but also that, for the law to be natural, it must speak immediately with nature's voice.

Thus, setting aside all those scientific books, which teach us only to see men the way they have made themselves, and meditating upon the first and simplest operations of the human soul, I believe I discern there two principles prior to reason: one makes us passionately interested in our well-being and in our own preservation, and the other inspires in us a natural repugnance at seeing any sensitive being perish or suffer, in particular, beings like ourselves. From the cooperation and combination our mind is able to create of these two principles—without it being necessary to bring in the principle of sociability—it seems to me, all the rules of natural right follow, rules which reason is later forced to re-establish on other foundations, when, through its successive developments, it has ended up effectively suffocating nature.

In this way, we are not obliged to make man a philosopher before we make him a man. His obligations towards others are not dictated to him exclusively by later lessons in wisdom, and so long as he does not resist the internal impulse of compassion, he will never do harm to another man, or even to any other sentient being, except in the legitimate case where, since his preservation is at stake, he is obliged to give preference to himself. In this way we also end the ancient disputes concerning the participation of animals in natural law. For it is clear that, lacking enlightenment and liberty, they cannot recognize this law. But because in some things they share our nature through the sensibility with which they are endowed, we judge that they should also share in natural right and that man is subject to some kind of duties towards them. It seems, in fact, that if I am obliged not to do any harm to my fellow man, that is not so much because he is a reasonable being as because he is a sentient being, a quality which, being common to animals and man, should at least confer on the former the right not be mistreated for no purpose by the latter.

This same study of original man, of his true needs, and of the fundamental principles of his duties, is also the only good method we can use to remove the great many difficulties which present themselves concerning the origin of moral inequality, the true foundation of the body politic, the reciprocal rights

of its members, and a thousand other similar questions, as important as the explanations for them are inadequate.

When we consider human society with a calm and disinterested gaze, at first it seems to reveal nothing but the violence of powerful men and the oppression of the weak. The mind is revolted by the harshness of the former, and we tend to deplore the blindness of the latter. And since nothing is less stable among men than these external relationships, which chance produces more often than wisdom and which we call power or weakness, wealth or poverty, human institutions appear at first glance to be founded on mounds of quicksand. It is not until we look at them closely, only after we have removed the dust and sand which surround the structure, that we perceive the unshakeable base on which it has been raised and learn to respect its foundations. Now, without the serious study of man, of his natural faculties, and of their successive developments, we will never succeed in making these distinctions, and in separating in the present constitution of things what divine will has created from what human art has claimed to do. Political and moral enquiries which have arisen from the important question I am examining are thus useful in all sorts of ways, and the hypothetical history of governments is for man an instructive lesson in every respect. By considering what we might have become, if we had been left to ourselves, we should learn to bless Him whose beneficent hand, correcting our institutions and giving them an unshakeable foundation, prevented the disorders they would have otherwise produced, and made our happiness emerge from means which seemed as if they ought to make us completely miserable.

Learn the person God has commanded you to be,
And in which part of human affairs you have been placed.⁸

⁸Rousseau quotes the Latin from Persius, "*Quem te Deus esse/ Jussit, et humana qua parte locatus es in re,/ Disce.*"

NOTICE ON THE NOTES

I have added some notes to this work in accordance with my lazy habit of working on this and that. These notes wander sometimes so far from the subject that it is not good to read them with the text. So I have shifted them to the end of the Discourse, in which I have tried to follow as best I can the most direct route. Those who have the courage to start again will be able to entertain themselves a second time by beating the bushes and striving to move through the notes. If other people do not read them at all, there will be little harm done.

QUESTION

PROPOSED BY THE ACADEMY OF DIJON

What is the origin of inequality among men, and is it authorized by natural law?

DISCOURSE ON THE ORIGIN AND THE FOUNDATIONS OF INEQUALITY AMONG MEN

I am to speak about man, and the question I am examining informs me that I am going to be speaking to men, for one does not propose questions like these when one is afraid of honoring the truth. Therefore, I will defend with confidence the cause of humanity in front of the wise men who invite me to do that, and I will not be unhappy with myself if I prove worthy of my subject and my judges.

In the human species I conceive two forms of inequality: one I call natural or physical, because it is established by nature and consists of the differences in age, health, bodily strength, and qualities of the mind or soul; the other we can call moral or political inequality, because it depends on some kind of convention and because it is established or at least authorized by the consent

of men. This latter form consists of the different privileges that some men enjoy to the detriment of others, such as being wealthier, more honored, or more powerful than they are, or even making other men obey them.

We cannot ask what the source of natural inequality is, because the answer is expressed in the simple definition of the word. Even less can we seek whether there might be some essential link between the two inequalities, for that would be asking, in other terms, if those who command are necessarily worth more than those who obey, and if the powers of the body or the mind, wisdom, or virtue are always found in the same individuals in proportion to power or wealth: it may be a good question to discuss among slaves while their masters are listening, but one not suitable for reasonable and free men seeking the truth.

So what precisely is the issue here in this Discourse? It is to mark in the progress of things the moment where, once right had taken over from violence, nature was subjected to law, and to explain by what sequence of astonishing events the strong could resolve to serve the weak and the people to purchase a notional repose at the expense of genuine happiness.

Philosophers who have examined the foundations of society have all sensed the need to go back to the state of nature, but none of them has arrived there. Some have not hesitated to attribute to man in this state the idea of the *just* and *unjust*, without taking the trouble to demonstrate that he had to have this idea or even that it was useful to him. Others have talked about the natural right which each man has to keep what belongs to him, without explaining what they mean by *to belong*. Others have begun by assigning to the strongest the authority over the weakest and have immediately created governments, without thinking of the time that must have elapsed before the meaning of the words *authority* and *government* could have existed among men. Finally, all of them, talking endlessly about need, greed, oppression, desires, and pride, have brought into the state of nature ideas they had derived from society. They have spoken about savage man and given a portrait of civil man. It has

not even entered the mind of most of our writers to doubt whether the state of nature existed, although it is evident from a reading of the Sacred Books that the first man, once he had received his understanding and precepts directly from God, was not himself in this state and that, when we accord to the writings of Moses the faith which every Christian philosopher owes them, we must deny that, even before the Flood, men ever found themselves in the pure state of nature, unless they fell back into it by some extraordinary event. This paradox is very difficult to defend and completely impossible to prove.

So let us begin by dispensing with all the facts, for they are not relevant to the question. We must not take the investigations that one could enter into concerning this subject for historical truths, but only for hypothetical and conditional arguments, more suitable for illuminating the nature of things than for showing the true origin, similar to those our physicists make every day concerning the formation of the earth. Religion orders us to believe that God Himself took men out of the state of nature and that they are unequal because He wanted them to be. But it does not prohibit us from forming conjectures drawn only from the nature of man and of the beings surrounding him concerning what the human race could have become had it been left abandoned to itself. That is what I am being asked and what I propose to examine in this Discourse. Since my subject deals with man in general, I will try to use a language suitable to all nations; or rather, forgetting times and places, so that I think only about the men to whom I am speaking, I will assume that I am in the school of Athens, repeating the lessons of my masters, with Platos and Xenocrateses for judges, and the human race as my audience.⁹

O man, no matter what country you are from, no matter what your opinions may be, listen. Here is your history the way I believed I read it, not in the books by your fellow men, who are liars, but in nature, which never lies. Everything that will be from her will be true. There will be nothing false except what I have mixed in of my own without wishing to do so. The times

⁹Xenocrates (396–314 BC) was Greek philosopher. He became head of Plato's Academy.

of which I am going to speak are far distant. How much have you changed from what you were! It is, so to speak, the life of your species that I am going to describe with reference to the qualities you have received, which your education and your habits may have corrupted, but which they have not been able to destroy. There is, I sense, an age at which the individual man would like to stop; you will be seeking the age at which you would wish your species had stopped. Unhappy with your present condition, for reasons which announce to your unfortunate descendants even greater discontent, perhaps you might wish you could go back, and this feeling should be the eulogy of your first ancestors, the critique of your contemporaries, and the dread of those who will have the misfortune to live after you.

FIRST PART

However important it may be in order to form a proper judgment of the natural state of man to consider him from his very origin and to examine him, so to speak, in the first embryo of the species, I will not follow his organic structure through its successive developments. I will not stop to investigate what he could have been at the start within the animal system in order to become what he finally is. I will not examine whether, as Aristotle thinks, his long nails were at first hooked claws, whether he was as hairy as a bear, and whether, moving on four feet (Note 3) with his gaze directed at the earth and limited to a horizon of a few paces, he did not at once demonstrate the nature and extent of his ideas. On this subject I would be able to form nothing but vague and almost imaginary conjectures. Comparative anatomy has thus far made too little progress, and the observations of naturalists are still too uncertain for us to be able to establish on such foundations the grounds for a solid argument. Thus, without having recourse to the supernatural knowledge we have in this matter, or taking into account the changes which must have occurred in the human structure, both internally and externally, as man applied his limbs to new uses and nourished himself on new foods, I will assume that he was formed at all times as I see him today, walking on two

feet, using his hands as we use ours, looking around at all of nature, and measuring with his eyes the vast expanse of the heavens.

By stripping the being formed in this way of all supernatural gifts he could have received and all the artificial faculties he could have acquired only by long progress, by considering him, in a word, as he must have come from the hands of nature, I see an animal less strong than some, less agile than others, but, taking everything into account, with the most advantageous structure of all. I see him eating his fill under an oak tree, quenching his thirst at the first stream, finding his bed at the foot of the same tree which provided his meal, and with that his needs are satisfied.

The earth, left to its natural fertility (Note 4) and covered with immense forests never mutilated by an axe, offers at every step storehouses and shelters for animals of every species. The men scattered among these species observe them, imitate their industry, and thus raise themselves to the level of animal instinct, with this advantage: each species has only its own appropriate instinct, while man perhaps has no instinct that belongs to him and so appropriates them all, feeds himself just as well with most of the various foods (Note 5) the other animals share among themselves, and as a result finds his subsistence more easily than any of them can.

Accustomed from infancy to intemperate weather and the rigour of the seasons, inured to fatigue, and forced, naked and without weapons, to defend their lives and their prey against other ferocious beasts or to escape them by running off, men develop in themselves a robust and almost unchangeable temperament. The children bring into the world the excellent constitution of their fathers, strengthen it through the same exercises which created it, and in this manner acquire all the vigour of which the human species is capable. Nature deals with them exactly as the law of Sparta did with the citizens' children: it makes those who are well-formed strong and robust and kills off all the others, differing in this respect from our societies, where the state, by

making children burdensome to their fathers, kills them indiscriminately before they are born.

Since the savage man's body is the only instrument he knows, he employs it for various uses of which, through lack of practice, our bodies are incapable. Our industry has taken away from us the strength and agility which necessity obliges him to acquire. If he had had an axe, would his wrist have broken off such strong branches? Had he had a sling, would his hand have thrown a stone so hard? Had he had a ladder, would he have climbed so nimbly up a tree? Had he had a horse, would he have run so quickly? Leave civilized man the time to collect all his machines around him, and there is no doubt he would easily overcome savage man. But if you want to see an even more unequal combat, set them naked and unarmed one against the other. You will soon recognize the advantage of constantly having all one's strength at one's disposal, of always being ready for any event, and of always carrying with oneself, so to speak, a completely integrated totality (Note 6).

Hobbes claims that man is naturally bold and seeks only to attack and fight. An illustrious philosopher thinks the opposite, and Cumberland and Pufendorf also affirm that nothing is as timid as man in a state of nature; he is always trembling, ready to run off at the slightest noise that strikes him, at the least movement he perceives.¹⁰ That may be the case for objects he does not recognize, and I have no doubt that he is frightened by all new sights that present themselves to him every time he cannot discern the physical good and bad he should expect from them, or compare his strength with the dangers he must encounter—rare circumstances in the state of nature, where everything proceeds in such a uniform manner and where the face of the earth is not subject to sudden and constant changes caused by the passions and by the fickleness of people in groups. But savage man, living dispersed among the

¹⁰Thomas Hobbes (1688–1679) was an English philosopher, famous for his political theory and his bleak view of the state of nature. Richard Cumberland (1631–1718), an English bishop and philosopher, wrote against Hobbes' theories and proposed a utilitarian doctrine; Samuel Pufendorf (1632–1674), a German baron and historian, was well-known for his writings on international law.

animals and finding himself early on in a position to measure himself against them, soon makes a comparison, and, sensing that he surpasses them in skill more than they surpass him in strength, he learns not to fear them anymore. Set a bear or a wolf to go against a robust savage, skillful and courageous, as they all are, armed with stones and a good stick, and you will observe that the danger will at least be reciprocal, and that after several such experiences, the wild beasts, which do not like to attack each other, will have little desire to attack man, whom they have discovered is just as ferocious as they are. As for animals which really do have more strength than he has skill, he is in their eyes in the position of other weaker species, which nonetheless continue to survive. But man does have an advantage: being no less able than they are to run off and finding an almost guaranteed refuge up in the trees, it is in every case up to him whether to accept or leave the encounter: he must choose between flight or combat. Let us add that it does not seem that any animal naturally wars against man, except in cases of its own defense or extreme hunger, nor does it manifest against him those violent antipathies which appear to announce that one species is destined by nature to serve as food for another.

[These are undoubtedly the reasons why Negroes and savages are so little concerned about the fierce beasts they may come across in the forest. In this respect the Caribbean [savages] of Venezuela, among others, live in the most absolute security and without the slightest inconvenience. Although they are almost naked, says Francisco Coreal, they are not afraid of exposing themselves in the forest armed only with bows and arrows, but nobody has ever heard of any of them being eaten by animals.]¹¹

Other more formidable enemies against which man does not have the same means of defending himself are the natural infirmities—infancy, old age, and all kinds of illnesses—sad indications of our frailty, of which the first two are common to all the animals and the last belongs principally to man living in

¹¹Francisco Coreal (1648-1708) was a Spanish traveler who visited North and South America and wrote about his journeys.

society. On the subject of infancy, I even notice that the mother carries her child everywhere with her and so finds feeding him a great deal easier than do the females of several animals who are forced to come and go continuously and grow very weary, moving in one direction to seek out their food and in another to suckle or feed their young. It is true that if the female happens to die, the child runs a great risk of perishing with her. But this danger is common to a hundred other species whose young are for a long time in no condition to go and look for their food themselves. And if infancy is longer among us, life is so as well. Everything is still roughly equal in this matter (Note 7), although there are other rules concerning the duration of the early years and the number of the young (Note 8) which are not part of my subject.

With the old, who do not move around much and perspire little, the need for food diminishes with the ability to provide it, and since the life of savages spares them gout and rheumatism, and since old age is of all the evils the one which human help can least relieve, they eventually die without anyone noticing that they no longer exist, and almost without noticing it themselves.

As far as sicknesses are concerned, I will not repeat the empty and false rants that the majority of people in good health deliver against medicine. But I will ask if there is some reliable observation on the basis of which one could conclude that in the countries where this art is most neglected, the average life of man is shorter than in those where it is cultivated with the greatest care. How could that be the case if we give ourselves more illnesses than medicine can provide us remedies? The extreme inequality in lifestyle, the excessive idleness of some people, the excessive labour of others, the ease with which we stimulate and satisfy our appetites and our sensuality, rich people's overly sophisticated food, which feeds them with hot reductions and oppresses them with indigestion, poor people's bad food, which most of the time they even go without, a lack that leads them to overstuff their stomachs greedily when they have an opportunity, staying up late, every sort of excess, immoderate transports of all the passions, fatigue, mental exhaustion, distress, and the numberless sorrows which people undergo in all circumstances and which

constantly wear down the soul—there you have the fatal proofs that most of our troubles are our own work and that we might have avoided almost all of them had we kept to the simple, uniform, and solitary way of life nature had prescribed for us.

If she intended for us to be healthy, I almost venture to affirm that the state of reflection is a condition contrary to nature, and that the man who meditates is a depraved animal. When we think about the good constitution of savages, at least of those whom we have not ruined with our strong liquors, when we realize that they are familiar with hardly any sicknesses other than wounds and old age, we are very much led to believe that we could easily produce the history of human illnesses by following the history of civil societies. That, at least, is the opinion of Plato, who concludes, on the basis of certain remedies used or approved by Podalirius and Machaon at the siege of Troy, that various illnesses, which these remedies should have made flare up, were not at that time known among men. [And Celsus states that diet, something essential nowadays, was first invented by Hippocrates.]¹²

With so few sources of illness, man in a state of nature thus has hardly any need for remedies, even less for doctors. In this respect, the human species is in a condition no worse than all the others. It is easy to find out from hunters whether, during their hunting, they find many sick animals. They do come across several that have received major wounds which have healed very well, or that have had bones, even limbs, broken and reset without any surgeon other than time or any treatment except their ordinary life, and that are no less perfectly cured for not having been tormented with incisions, poisoned by drugs, or worn out with fasting. Finally, however useful well-administered medicine may be among us, it is still true that if the sick savage left on his own has nothing to hope for except from nature, he has, on the other hand,

¹²In Homer's *Iliad*, Podalirius and Machaon are the healers in the Argive army fighting against Troy; Aulus Cornelius Celsus (fl. 14 AD), a Roman, wrote books on medicine; Hippocrates (460-370 BC) was a famous Greek healer, the father of medicine.

nothing to fear except his illness, a fact which often renders his situation preferable to ours.

So let us be careful not to confuse savage man with the men we have before our eyes. Nature treats all the animals left in her care with a partiality that appears to demonstrate how jealous she is of this right. In the forests the horse, cat, bull, and even the donkey for the most part have a greater height; all have a more robust constitution, more energy, strength, and courage in the forests than in our homes. They lose half of these advantages by becoming domesticated, and we could say that all our care in treating these animals well and feeding them ends up merely degrading them. The same is true of man himself. By becoming sociable and enslaved, he becomes weak, fearful, and groveling, and his soft and effeminate way of life ends by enervating both his strength and his courage. Let us add that between the savage and domesticated conditions, the difference between man and man must be even greater than the one between beast and beast, for if animal and man have been treated equally by nature, all the things man gives himself for his own convenience—more than he does to the animals he tames—are so many particular causes which make him degenerate more appreciably.

Thus, nudity, lack of habitation, and going without all of those useless things we believe are so necessary are not such a great misfortune for these first men or, above all, such a great obstacle to their preservation. If they do not have hairy skin, they do not need it in hot countries, and in cold countries they soon learn to appropriate for their own use the skins of beasts they have overcome. If they have only two feet for running, they have two arms to provide for their defense and their needs. Their children perhaps begin to walk late and with difficulty, but their mothers carry them easily, an advantage missing in other species, where the mother, if she is chased, finds herself forced to abandon her young or to regulate her pace to theirs. [There could be a few exceptions to this, for instance, the animal from the province of Nicaragua which looks like a fox and has feet like a man's hand, and which, according to Coreal, has a pouch under its belly, in which the mother puts her

young when she is forced to flee. This is undoubtedly the same animal as the one called *tlaquatzin* in Mexico. Laet says the female of this species has a similar pouch for the same purpose.]¹³ Finally, unless we assume those unusual and fortuitous combinations of circumstances which I will mention in what follows and which could very well never have happened, it is in any event clear that the first who made clothing or a lodging for himself, was, in doing so, providing himself with some things for which he had little need, because he had gone without them up to that point, and because one does not see why, as a grown man, he could not have put up with a way of life he had endured since he was an infant.

Solitary, idle, and always close to danger, savage man must like to sleep and have a light sleep, like the animals, which do not think very much and sleep, so to speak, all the time they are not thinking. Since his own preservation is almost his only concern, the faculties he exercises most must be those whose main purpose is attack and defense, whether to overcome his prey or to protect himself from being the prey of another animal. By contrast, the organs which do not improve except by softness and sensuality must remain in a coarse state, which prevents any kind of refined sensitivity in him. In this respect his senses will be divided: he will have an extremely rudimentary sense of touch and taste, but the greatest subtlety of sight, hearing, and smell. Such is the condition of animals generally, and, according to what travellers report, it is the same with the majority of savage people. So we should not be astonished that the Hottentots of the Cape of Good Hope discern with their naked eyes ships on the high seas at the same distance the Dutch see them with telescopes, or that the savages of America smell the Spaniards on the trail, just as the best dogs would have been able to do, or that all these barbaric nations tolerate their nakedness without difficulty, spice up their taste with peppers, and drink European liquor like water.

¹³Johannes de Laet was a Dutch writer who published a book on his travels in the Americas in 1625.

Thus far I have considered only physical man. Let us now attempt to see him from the metaphysical and moral side.

In every animal I see only an ingenious machine to which nature has given senses so that it can re-energize and protect itself, up to a certain point, from everything that tends to destroy or to disturb it. I see precisely the same things in the human machine, with this difference: nature alone causes all the operations in the beast; whereas, man contributes to his own operation in his capacity as a free agent. One chooses or refuses by instinct, and the other by an act of freedom. This means that the beast cannot deviate from the rule prescribed for it, even when it would be advantageous to do so, and that man does deviate from the rule, often to his disadvantage. That is why a pigeon would die of hunger next to a bowl filled with the finest meats, as would a cat sitting on piles of fruit or grain, although both of them could feed themselves very well on the food they reject, if they were of a mind to try it. For this reason, dissolute men abandon themselves to excesses which bring them fever and death, because the mind corrupts the sense and because the will still speaks when nature is silent.

Every animal has ideas, because it has senses. It even combines its ideas up to a certain point, and man is no different from a beast in this respect, except in degree. Some philosophers have even proposed that there is a greater difference between one man and another than there is between some men and certain animals. Hence, it is not so much the understanding that creates the specific distinction between animals and man, as it is man's quality of being a free agent. Nature commands every animal, and the beast obeys. Man experiences the same sensation, but he recognizes that he is free to agree or to resist, and it is above all in the consciousness of this freedom that the spirituality of his soul reveals itself. For physics explains in some manner the mechanical working of the senses and the formation of ideas, but in the power to will, or rather to choose, and in the feeling of this power, we find only purely spiritual acts, about which nothing is explained by the laws of mechanics.

But if the difficulties which surround all these questions leave some room for contesting this difference between man and animal, there is another very particular quality which distinguishes them and about which there can be no dispute—that is, the faculty of perfecting oneself, a faculty which, with the help of circumstances, develops all the others in succession and which resides among us, as much in the species as in the individual; whereas an animal is, at the end of a few months, what it will be all its life, and its species at the end of a thousand years is what it was during the first year of this millennium. Why is man alone subject to becoming an imbecile? Is it not because that is when he returns to his primitive condition and because the beast, which has acquired nothing and also has nothing to lose, always retains his instinct, whereas man, once he loses by old age or other accidents everything which his *perfectibility* has led him to acquire, falls back in this way even lower than a beast? It would be sad for us to be forced to concur that this distinctive and almost unlimited faculty is the source of all the misfortunes of man, that this is what pulls him by the power of time out of this original condition, in which he would live through peaceful and innocent days, that it is what gives birth with the centuries to his enlightenment and his errors, his vices and his virtues, and eventually makes him the tyrant of himself and of nature (Note 9). It would be dreadful to be obliged to praise as a benevolent being the man who was the first to suggest to the inhabitant on the banks of the Orinoco the practice of tying onto the temples of his children those boards that assure them at least a portion of their imbecility and their original happiness.

Savage man, left by nature merely to his instinct, or rather compensated for the instinct he perhaps lacks by faculties capable of replacing it at first and later raising him far above it, will thus begin with purely animal functions (Note 10): perceiving and feeling will be his first condition, which will be common to him and all the animals. Willing and not willing, desiring and fearing, will be the first and almost the only operations of his soul, until new circumstances produce new developments in it.

Whatever moralists may say about the subject, human understanding owes a great deal to the passions, which, by common acknowledgment, also owe a great deal to it. It is through their activity that our reason is perfected. We seek to understand only because we desire to enjoy, and it is not possible to conceive why someone who has neither desires nor fears would take the trouble to reason. The passions, in their turn, originate from our needs and their progress from our knowledge. For we cannot desire or fear things except through the ideas we can have about them or by simple natural impulse. And savage man, deprived of every kind of enlightenment, experiences only the passions of the latter sort: his desires do not go beyond his physical needs (Note 11). The only good things he knows in the universe are food, a female, and rest. The only evils he fears are pain and hunger. I say pain and not death, for an animal will never know what it is to die, and the knowledge of death and its terrors is one of the first acquisitions man made in moving away from the animal condition.

It would be easy for me, if that were necessary, to support this opinion with facts and to demonstrate that in all the nations of the world the progress of the mind has been exactly proportional to the needs people have received from nature or to those to which they have been subjected by circumstances, and as a result to the passions which encouraged them to supply those needs. I would show the arts being born in Egypt and expanding with the flooding of the Nile; I would follow their progress among the Greeks, where they were seen to germinate, grow, and rise to the heavens among the sands and rocks of Attica, without being able to take root on the fertile banks of the Eurotas.¹⁴ I would observe that in general the people of the north are more industrious than those of the south, because they can less afford not to be, as if nature wanted in this way to equal things out by giving their minds the fertility she denies their soil.

¹⁴Eurotas was the river associated with Sparta, a much more fertile territory than Attica, the area around Athens.

But without relying on the uncertain testimonies of history, who does not see that everything seems to remove from savage man the temptation and the means to cease being a savage? His imagination does not picture anything to him; his heart demands nothing of him. His modest needs are so easily found at hand, and he is so far from the degree of knowledge necessary for him to desire to obtain greater knowledge, that he can possess neither foresight nor curiosity. The spectacle of nature becomes indifferent to him by becoming familiar. There is always the same order, always the same revolutions. He does not have the mind to be astonished at the greatest marvels, and it is not in him that we must look for the philosophy man needs in order to know how to observe once what he has been looking at every day. His soul, which nothing troubles, surrenders itself to the single feeling of his present existence, without any idea of the future, no matter how close it may be, and his projects, as limited as his views, hardly reach to the end of the day. Even now the degree of foresight in a native of the Caribbean is like that: in the morning he sells his cotton bed, and in the evening he comes crying to buy it back again, for lack of anticipating that he would need it for the next night.

The more one meditates upon this subject, the greater the distance from pure sense experience to the simplest knowledge grows before our eyes, and it is impossible to conceive how a man could, through his own power alone, without the aid of communication and without necessity's goad, have crossed over such an interval. How many centuries perhaps went by before men were in a position to see some fire other than the one in the sky? How many different chance events did they need in order to learn the most common uses of that element? How many times did they let it go out, before acquiring the art of reproducing it? And how many times perhaps did each of these secrets die with the man who had discovered it? What will we say about agriculture, an art which requires so much work and foresight, which depends on other arts, which is obviously practical only in a society that has at least begun, and which serves us, not so much to obtain from the earth foodstuffs that it would provide well enough without agriculture, as to force from it those preferences that are most to our taste? But let us suppose that men had multiplied to such

an extent that natural productions were no longer sufficient to feed them, an assumption which, incidentally, would show that for the human species there was a great advantage in this way of life. Let us assume that, without forges and without workshops, tools for farming had fallen from heaven into the hands of savages, that these men had overcome the mortal hatred they all have for continuous labor, that they had learned to anticipate their needs so far ahead of time; that they had guessed how one must cultivate the earth, sow seeds, and plant trees; that they had discovered the arts of grinding wheat and setting grapes to ferment—all things they would have had to be taught by the gods, since it is inconceivable how they would have learned them on their own. After all that, what man would be so insane as to bother cultivating a field which will be stripped by the first newcomer, either man or beast, who finds this harvest agreeable? And how could each man decide to spend his life in painful work, when the more he needs the reward of that labor, the more certain he will be of not receiving it? In a word, how could this situation encourage men to cultivate the earth, so long as it has not been divided up among them, that is, so long as the state of nature has not been abolished?

If we wished to assume that savage man is as skillful in the art of thinking as our philosophers make him out to be, if we make him, following their example, into a philosopher himself, discovering on his own the most sublime truths, creating for himself, by sequences of very abstract argument, maxims of justice and reason derived from the love of order in general or from the known will of his Creator—in a word, if we were to assume that he has a mind with as much intelligence and enlightenment as he needs, but in fact we find him dull and stupid, what use would the species derive from all this metaphysics, which could not be communicated and would perish with the individual who had invented it? What progress could the human race have made scattered through the woods among the animals? And up to what point could men have perfected themselves and have enlightened each other, when they had no fixed domicile and no need for one another, and so would scarcely meet, perhaps twice in their lives, without knowing or talking to each other?

If one considers how many ideas we owe to the use of speech, how much grammar trains and facilitates the operations of the mind, and one thinks of the inconceivable difficulties and of the infinite time which the first invention of languages must have cost; if we link these reflections to the preceding ones, we will be able to judge how many thousands of centuries it must have taken for the human mind to sequentially develop the operations it can carry out.

Allow me to consider for a moment the difficulties concerning the origin of languages. I could content myself with citing or repeating here the investigations that the Abbé de Condillac has made into this matter, which all fully confirm my opinion and perhaps gave me the original idea about it.¹⁵ But because the way in which this philosopher resolves the difficulties he makes for himself concerning the origin of established signs shows that he has assumed what I am putting into question—that is, a kind of society already established among the inventors of language—I believe that in referring to his reflections I ought to add my own to them in order to throw some light on these same difficulties in a manner appropriate to my subject. The first one that presents itself is to imagine how languages could have become necessary. For since men had no connections with each other, nor any need for them, one can conceive neither why this invention was necessary nor how it was possible, unless it was indispensable. I could well say, as do many others, that languages were born in the domestic interaction of fathers, mothers, and children. But aside from the fact that this would not resolve the objections, it would be committing the fault of those who, in reasoning about the state of nature, bring into it ideas taken from society and always see the family gathered together in the same dwelling with its members maintaining among themselves a union as intimate and as permanent as among us, where so many common interests keep them together; whereas, in this primitive condition, having neither house, nor huts, nor any kind of property, each man found his own lodging randomly, and often only for one night. The males and females

¹⁵Etienne Bonnot de Condillac (1715–1788) was a French philosopher and cleric who wrote about the origins of human knowledge in sense perception.

came together fortuitously, according to chance encounters, opportunity, and desire, without speech being very necessary to interpret things they had to tell each other. They separated just as easily (Note 12). At first the mother suckled her children to satisfy her own need; then, once the habit made them dear to her, she later fed them to meet their needs. As soon as they had the strength to seek out their own food, they did not hesitate to leave the mother, and since there was hardly any way of finding each other again other than not to lose sight of one another, they were soon at the stage where they did not even recognize each other. Bear in mind as well that since the child has all his needs to explain, and consequently more things to say to the mother than the mother has to say to the child, it is the child who must play the most significant role in inventing language, and that the one it uses must be in large part its own work, which multiplies languages by as many individuals as there are to speak them. Contributing further to this is a wandering and vagabond life that does not give any idiom time to acquire consistency. For to say that the mother dictates to her child the words which it must use to ask her for something or other explains well enough how one teaches languages that are already formed but not how they are formed.

Suppose we have overcome this first difficulty. Let us for a moment move across the immense space that must have existed between the pure state of nature and the need for languages, and, assuming they are necessary (Note 13), let us examine how they could have started to get established. Here is a new difficulty, even worse than the previous one. For if men needed speech in order to learn how to think, they had an even greater need to know how to think in order to discover the art of speech. And even if we understood how vocal sounds were taken as the conventional interpreters of our ideas, it would still remain to know what in this convention could have been the particular interpretative sounds for those ideas which have no sensible object and thus could be indicated neither by gesture nor by voice, so that we can hardly form plausible conjectures about the origin of this art of communicating thoughts and establishing an exchange among minds, a sublime art which is already so distant from its origin, but which the philosopher still sees at such an

enormous distance from its perfection that there is no man sufficiently bold to affirm that it will ever reach that point, even if the revolutions which time necessarily brings on should be suspended in its favor, and if prejudices were to leave the academies or remain silent before them, and if they could keep themselves working uninterrupted on this thorny issue for entire centuries.

Man's first language, the most universal language, the most energetic, and the only one he needed before he had to persuade groups of men, is the cry of nature. Since this cry was dragged out only by a kind of instinct in urgent situations, to plead for assistance in great dangers or for relief in violent distress, it was not used very much in the ordinary course of life, where more moderate sentiments prevail. When men's ideas began to expand and multiply, and when closer communication was established among them, they looked for more numerous signs and a more extensive language. They multiplied their vocal inflections and added gestures to them, which by their nature are more expressive and whose sense depends less on a previous determination. Thus, they expressed visible and moving objects by gestures and those that strike the ear by imitative sounds. But since a gesture indicates almost nothing except present objects, or those easy to describe, and visible actions, and since it is not universally applicable, for darkness or the interposition of a body makes it useless, and since it demands rather than attracts attention, they finally got the idea of substituting for gestures vocal articulations, which, without having the same relationship to particular ideas, are more appropriate to represent them all as established signs. This substitution could not be made except by common agreement and in a manner difficult enough to practice for men whose rudimentary vocal organs had not yet had any exercise and still more difficult to conceive in itself, since this common accord must have been motivated, and speech appears to have been extremely necessary for its use to be established.

We must assume that since the first words which men made use of had in their minds a much more extensive meaning than those we use in languages already formed, and that since they knew nothing about the division of speech

into its constitutive parts, at first they gave each word the sense of an entire proposition. Once they began to distinguish the subject from the predicate and the verb from the noun, which was no mean effort of genius, the substantives at first were nothing more than so many proper nouns, the [present] infinitive was the only verb tense, and as far as adjectives are concerned, the idea for them must have developed only with great difficulty, because every adjective is an abstract word and abstractions are difficult and not very natural operations.

Every object at first was given a particular name, without regard to kinds and species, something which those first inventors were not in a position to distinguish, and all the discrete entities presented themselves to their minds as in isolation, as they do in the picture of nature. If one oak tree was called A, another oak tree was called B. [For the first idea one derives from two things is that they are not the same. Often a good deal of time is necessary to observe what they have in common.] Hence, the more limited their knowledge, the more extensive their dictionary became. The inconvenience of all this nomenclature could not have been easily removed, for to arrange beings under common and generic denominations, one had to know their properties and their differences. This required observations and definitions, that is, natural history and metaphysics, a great deal more than the men of those times could have had.

Furthermore, general ideas cannot be introduced into the mind except with the help of words, and the understanding does not grasp them except by propositions. That is one of the reasons why animals cannot form such ideas, nor ever acquire the perfectibility that depends on them. When a monkey goes without hesitation from one nut to another, do we think it has a general idea of this sort of fruit and that it compares its archetype to these two individual nuts? Undoubtedly not; but the sight of one of these nuts recalls to its memory sensations which it received from the other, and its eyes, modified in a certain way, announce to its taste the modification it is about to receive. Every general idea is purely intellectual. Once the imagination gets involved

in the slightest, the idea immediately becomes particular. Try to draw for yourself the image of a tree in general; you will never succeed. In spite of yourself, it must be seen as small or large, sparse or leafy, light or dark, and if you were able to see there only what is found in every tree, that image would no longer resemble a tree. Purely abstract entities are seen in the same manner or are conceived only through discourse. Only the definition of the triangle gives you the true idea of it. As soon as you draw one in your mind, it is such and such a triangle and not another, and you cannot avoid giving it perceptible lines or a colored surface. We must therefore articulate propositions, and we have to speak in order to have general ideas. For as soon as the imagination stops, the mind moves no further except with the help of discourse. Hence, if the first inventors could give names only to ideas that they had already, it follows that these first substantives could never have been anything but proper nouns.

But when, by methods which I do not understand, our new grammarians began to extend their ideas and to generalize their words, the ignorance of the inventors must have subjected this method to very narrow limits, and since they had at the beginning excessively multiplied the names of discrete entities because they did not know about genera and species, they later created too few species and genera, for lack of having considered beings by all their differences. To push these divisions far enough would have required more experience and enlightenment than they could have had, along with more research and work than they wanted to spend on it. Now, if, even today, we are discovering every day new species which so far have escaped all our observations, think how many must have been hidden from men who did not judge things except by their first appearance! As for primitive classes and the most general notions, it is superfluous to add that these must have escaped them as well. How, for example, would they have imagined or understood the words matter, mind, substance, mode, figure, and movement, given that our philosophers, who have made use of them for such a long time, themselves have real difficulty understanding them and that, since the ideas

attached to these words are purely metaphysical, they found no model of them in nature?

I stop with these first steps, and I beg my judges to suspend their reading here, in order to consider, in this matter of the invention of physical substantives alone, that is to say, of the part of language easiest to discover, the road language must still travel to express all the thoughts of men, to take on a constant form, to be able to be spoken in public, and to influence society. I beg them to reflect on the time and knowledge it must have required to find numbers (Note 14), abstract words, aorists, and all the verb tenses, particles, and syntax, to connect propositions and arguments, and to form the entire logic of discourse. As for myself, frightened by the multiplying difficulties and convinced of the almost proven impossibility that languages could have arisen and established themselves by purely human means, I leave to whoever wishes to undertake it the discussion of the following difficult problem: Which was more necessary, that society be already in place for the institution of languages or that languages be already invented for the establishment of society?

Whatever these origins may be, at least we see, from the little care which nature took to bring men together through their mutual needs and to facilitate the use of speech for them, how little she prepared them for sociability and how little she contributed of her own to everything they have done in order to establish social bonds. In fact, it is impossible to imagine why, in this primitive state, one man would have more need of another man than a monkey or a wolf would of a creature like itself, or, if we assume this need, what motive could persuade the other man to provide it, or even, in this last case, how they could mutually agree on terms. I know that people constantly repeat to us that nothing would have been so miserable as man in this state and, if it is true, as I believe I have proved, that man could not have had the desire and the opportunity to leave this state until after several centuries, that would be an indictment against nature and not against the one she had constituted in this way. But if I understand this term *miserable* properly, it is a word that has no meaning, or that signifies only a painful lack and a physical

or spiritual suffering. Now, I really would like someone to explain to me what type of misery there could be for a free being whose heart is at peace and whose body is healthy. I ask the following: Which is more subject to becoming unbearable for those who enjoy it, a civil or natural life? Around us we see hardly any people who do not complain about their existence and several who even take their own lives, to the extent they are capable of it, and the combination of divine and human laws is scarcely sufficient to check this disorder. I ask, has anyone ever heard it said that a savage at liberty has so much as dreamed of complaining about life and of killing himself? Thus people should judge with less pride on which side true misery lies. By contrast, nothing would have been as miserable as savage man dazzled by enlightenment, tormented by passions, and reasoning about a state different from his own. It was thanks to a very wise providence that the potential faculties he had were to develop only with opportunities to practice them, so that they were neither superfluous nor a bother to him before then, nor belated and useless when needed. He had in instinct alone everything he needed to live in a state of nature, and in a cultivated reason has only what he needs to live in society.

At first it seems that since men in this state did not have any kind of moral relations among themselves or any known duties, they could not have been either good or bad or have had either vices or virtues, unless we take these words in a physical sense and call vices in the individual the qualities which can injure his own preservation and virtues those which can contribute to it, in which case we would have to call the most virtuous men those who least resisted the simple natural impulses. But without moving away from the ordinary meaning of these words, it is appropriate to suspend the judgment we could bring to bear on such a situation and to resist our prejudices until, scale in hand, we have examined if there are more virtues than vices among civilized men, or if their virtues are more advantageous than their vices calamitous, or if the progress of their knowledge is a sufficient compensation for the evils they inflict on one another, as they learn about the good they ought to do, or if, taking everything into account, they would not be in a

happier situation if they did not have anything bad to fear or good to hope for from anyone, rather than being subjected to universal dependency and obliged to receive everything from those who are not obligated to give them anything.

Above all, let us not conclude with Hobbes that, since man has not the slightest idea of goodness, he is naturally wicked, that he is vicious because he does not know virtue, that he always denies his fellows services which he does not believe he owes them, and that, by virtue of the right which he reasonably attributes to himself to things he needs, he wildly imagines that he alone owns the entire universe. Hobbes saw very well the defect of all the modern definitions of natural right, but the conclusions he draws from his own show that he took it in a sense that is no less erroneous. By reasoning on the basis of the principles he established, this author should have said that since the state of nature is the one in which care for our own preservation is the least prejudicial to the preservation of others, this state was therefore the most appropriate to peace and the most suitable for the human race. He says precisely the opposite, because he made the mistake of allowing into savage man's care for his own preservation the need to satisfy a multitude of passions that are the work of society and have made laws necessary. The wicked man, he says, is a robust child. But whether savage man is a sturdy child remains to be known. If we granted him this point, what would he conclude from it? That if, when he is robust, this man was just as dependent on others as when he is weak, there is no kind of excess to which he would not be carried: he would strike his mother when she was too late giving him her teat, he would strangle one of his young brothers when he annoyed him, and he would bite someone else's leg when it struck or bothered him. But being robust and being dependent in the state of nature are two contradictory assumptions. Man is weak when he is dependent, and he is free before he is robust. Hobbes did not see that the same cause that prevents savages from using their reason, as our jurists claim, prevents them at the same time from abusing their faculties, as he himself claims, so that we could say that savages are not evil precisely because they do not know what it is to be good. For it is neither the

development of enlightenment nor the restraint of law which prevents them from doing evil, but the tranquility of their passions and their ignorance of vice: *That is how much more ignorance of vice is profitable to those men, than a knowledge of virtue is to these.*¹⁶ There is, in addition, another principle, which Hobbes did not notice, and which, having been given to man to soften, in certain circumstances, the ferocity of his *amour propre* or, before the birth of this love, the desire to preserve himself (Note 15), tempers the ardour he has for his well-being by an innate repugnance to seeing a creature like himself suffer. I do not think I have to fear any contradiction by ascribing to man the only natural virtue that the most extravagant detractor of human virtues has been forced to recognize. I am speaking of pity, a disposition appropriate to beings as weak and subject to as many evils as we are, a virtue all the more universal and all the more useful to man because in him it comes before he uses any reflection and is so natural that even beasts occasionally provide some perceptible signs of it. Without speaking of the tenderness of mothers towards their young and the dangers they face to keep them safe, we see every day the repugnance of horses at stepping on a living body. An animal does not move past a dead animal of its own species without unease. There are even some who give them a kind of burial. And the sad lowing of cattle as they move into a slaughterhouse indicates the impression they get of the horrific spectacle which strikes them. With pleasure we see the author of the *Fable of the Bees* compelled to recognize man as a compassionate and sensitive being and, in the example he gives of that, moving away from his cold and subtle style, in order to offer us the pathetic image of a man in prison who notices outside a ferocious beast ripping a child from its mother's breast, crushing its weak limbs in its murderous teeth, and ripping out with its claws this child's quivering entrails.¹⁷ What horrific agitation must be felt by this witness to an event in which he has no personal

¹⁶Rousseau quotes the Latin: *tanto plus in illis proficit vitiorum ignoratio, quam in his cognitio virtutis*—a comment by the historian Justin comparing barbarians favourably to the Greeks.

¹⁷*The Fable of the Bees* is a famous satiric poem written in 1705 by the Dutch-Englishman Bernard Mandeville. It explores the connections between vice and social progress. Mandeville is the person Rousseau is referring to earlier in the paragraph when he uses the phrase “the most extravagant detractor of human virtues.”

interest? What agonies does he not suffer from the sight and from his inability to bring any help to the fainting mother or the dying child?

That is what the pure movement of nature is like, before all reflection. Such is the force of natural pity, which the most depraved morals still have trouble destroying, since we see every day in our theatres a man being moved and weeping at the troubles of some unfortunate person, the kind of man who, if he were in a tyrant's position, would increase even more his enemy's torments [like bloodthirsty Sulla, who was so sensitive to the evils he had not caused, or like Alexander of Pherae, who did not dare attend the performance of any tragedy for fear he might be seen weeping with Andromache and Priam, and who nonetheless listened without feeling anything to the cries of so many citizens who were butchered on his orders every day: *By giving tears, nature reveals that she gave the human race the softest hearts*].¹⁸

Mandeville well perceived that with all their morality human beings would never have been anything but monsters, if nature had not given them pity to assist their reason. But he did not see that from this quality alone follow all the social virtues that he wants to deny to men. In fact, what are generosity, clemency, and humanity, if not pity applied to the weak, to the culpable, or to the human species in general? Even benevolence and friendship, properly understood, are products of a constant pity fixed on a particular object. For what is desiring that someone does not suffer other than desiring that he is happy? Even if it were true that commiseration was merely a feeling which places us in the position of the person suffering, an obscure and lively sentiment in savage man, and developed but weak in civil man, how would this idea affect the truth of what I am saying, unless to reinforce it? In fact, commiseration will be all the more intense as the animal looking on identifies more intimately with the suffering animal. Now, it is evident that this

¹⁸Sulla (138 BC to 78 BC) was a Roman politician who seized control of Rome and persecuted his enemies. Alexander of Pherae (d. 358 BC) was a tyrant in Thessaly, finally killed by members of his family. Priam and Andromache, of the Trojan royal family, were frequently portrayed in tragic drama. Rousseau then quotes the Latin from the satirist Juvenal: *Mollissima corda/ Humano generi dare se natura fatetur/ Quae lacrimas dedit.*

identification must have been infinitely closer in the state of nature than in the state of reasoning. It is reason that gives rise to *amour propre*, and it is reflection that strengthens it. Reason is what turns man back onto himself; it is what separates him from everything which upsets and afflicts him. It is philosophy that isolates him. It is by way of it that he says in secret, at the sight of a man suffering: “Perish if you wish; I am safe.” Nothing troubles the calm sleep of the philosopher and drags him from his bed any more, other than dangers to all of society. One can slit the throat of his fellow man under the philosopher’s window with impunity; he has only to put his hands over his ears and argue with himself for a little while in order to prevent nature, which rebels within him, from identifying with the one being murdered. Savage man does not have this admirable talent and, for lack of wisdom and reason, is always surrendering to the first feeling of humanity, without thinking about it. In riots and street quarrels, the populace crowds together, while the prudent man moves away. It is the riff-raff, it is the women of the market who separate the combatants and prevent honest folk from cutting each other’s throats.

Hence, it is certain that pity is a natural feeling that, by moderating in each individual the activities of his *amour de soi-même*, contributes to the mutual preservation of the entire species. It is pity that prompts us without reflection to help those we see suffering and which, in the state of nature, takes the place of laws, morals, and virtue, with this advantage: no one is tempted to disobey its sweet voice. It is pity that will deter every robust savage from robbing a weak child or an infirm old man of the subsistence they have with difficulty acquired, if he himself hopes to be able to find his own elsewhere. It is pity that, in the place of this sublime maxim of rational justice—*Do unto others what you wish they do unto you*—inspires in all men this other maxim of natural goodness, much less perfect than the preceding one, but perhaps more useful: *Do what is good for you with the least possible harm to others*. Briefly put, it is in this natural sentiment rather than in subtle arguments that we must seek out the cause of the repugnance that all men would experience at doing wrong, even independently of educational maxims. Although it could be

appropriate for Socrates and minds of his caliber to acquire virtue through reason, the human race would have ceased to be a long time ago, if its preservation had depended solely on the reasoning of those who constitute it.

With passions so little active, and with such a healthy restraint, men more wild than evil and more attentive to keeping themselves from the harm they could receive than tempted to commit harm to others were not subject to very dangerous quarrels. Since they had no type of interaction with each other and, as a result, had no knowledge of vanity or respect or esteem or contempt, since they did not have the least notion of *yours* and *mine* or any genuine idea of justice, since they looked upon the violence which they could run into as an easily redressed harm rather than an affront one must punish, and since they did not even dream of vengeance, except perhaps as an immediate mechanical reflex, like the dog that bites the stone thrown at him, their disputes would rarely have had bloody consequences, if they had no subject more pressing than food. But I see a more dangerous matter about which I still have to speak.

Among the passions which disturb man's heart, there is one which is ardent and impetuous and which makes one sex necessary to the other, a terrible passion that defies all dangers, overturns all obstacles, and in its fury seems likely to destroy the human race which it is destined to preserve. What would become of men in the grip of this frantic and brutal rage, without shame, without modesty, and fighting every day over their loves at the expense of their blood?

First, we must acknowledge that the more violent the passions are, the more laws are necessary to contain them. But setting aside the fact that the disorders and crimes that the passions cause every day among us sufficiently demonstrate the inadequacy of laws in this matter, it would still be good to examine if these disorders were not born with the laws themselves. Thus, if they were capable of repressing these disorders, the least we should demand of laws would be that they stop an evil which would not exist without them.

Let us begin by distinguishing the moral from the physical in the feeling of love. The physical is that general desire which encourages one sex to unite with the other; the moral is what determines this desire and fixes it on a single object exclusively, or which at least provides it with a greater degree of energy for this preferred object. Now, it is easy to see that the moral aspect of love is an artificial sentiment, born from social habit and celebrated by women with a great deal of skill and care in order to establish their sway and to make dominant the sex that should obey. Since this feeling is founded on certain notions of merit or beauty that a savage is in no condition to have, and on comparisons he is not capable of making, it must be almost nothing for him. For as his mind could not form abstract ideas of regularity and proportion, so his heart is no more susceptible to the sentiments of admiration and love which, even imperceptibly, arise from the application of these ideas. He listens exclusively to the temperament he has received from nature, not to the taste he could not have acquired, and any woman is fine with him.

Limited solely to the physical aspect of love, and happy enough to be ignorant of those preferences which stimulate sentiment and increase the difficulties it causes, men must feel the ardor of their temperaments less frequently and less vividly, and thus the disputes among them must be rarer and less cruel. The imagination, which creates so many ravages among us, does not speak to savage hearts. Each man waits peacefully for the natural impulse, surrenders to it without choice and with more pleasure than fury, and once the need is satisfied, all desire is extinguished.

It is thus indisputable that love itself, like all the other passions, only acquires in society that impetuous ardour that makes it so often fatal to men, and it is all the more ridiculous to picture savages continually slitting each other's throats in order to satisfy their brutality, since this view is directly contrary to experience: of all existing people, those in the Caribbean are the ones who, up to this point, have strayed the least from the state of nature, and they are precisely the ones who are the most peaceful in their loves and the least

subject to jealousy, even though they live in a burning climate which always seems to generate greater activity in these passions.

With respect to the conclusions we could draw in several species of animals from the fighting of the males, who in every season bloody our barnyards or make our forests in springtime echo with their cries, as they quarrel over the female, we must begin by excluding all species where nature has manifestly established in the relative power of the sexes relationships different from those among us. Thus, one can draw no conclusion about the human species from fights among roosters. In species where proportion is better observed, these fights can be caused only by the scarcity of females with respect to the number of males, or by the exclusive periods during which the female constantly refuses the male's approach, a factor which goes back to the first cause. For if each female endures the male only for two months of the year, that is, in this matter, as if the number of females were reduced by five-sixths. Now, neither of these two cases applies to the human species, where the number of females generally surpasses the number of males and where no one has ever observed, even among savages, that females have times of heat and of exclusion, like those in other species. Moreover, since with several of these animals the entire species goes into heat at the same time, there comes a terrible moment of common passion, tumult, disorder, and combat, a time which has no place among the human species, where love is never intermittent. Hence, we cannot conclude from the fights among certain animals for the possession of the females that the same thing would happen to man in the state of nature. And even if we could draw this conclusion, since these quarrels do not destroy other species, we must at least grant that they would not be any more fatal to ours, and it is very apparent that they would cause even fewer ravages in that state than they do in society, above all in the countries where, because morality still counts for something, the jealousy of lovers and the vengeance of husbands every day cause duels, murders, and worse, where the obligation to be eternally faithful serves only to produce adulteries, and where even the laws dealing with continence and honour necessarily foster debauchery and multiply abortions.

Let us conclude that wandering in the forests without labor, without speech, without a home, without war, and without relationships, with no need for his fellow men, and similarly with no desire to harm them, perhaps even without ever recognizing any of them individually, savage man, subject to few passions and self-sufficient, would have had only the sentiments and enlightenment appropriate to this state. He would have felt nothing but his true needs and looked only at what he believed he had an interest in seeing. His intelligence would have progressed no further than his vanity. If by chance he made some discovery, he could no more have communicated it than he could have recognized even his own children. Art died with the inventor. There was neither education nor progress. The generations multiplied aimlessly, and, since each one always set out from the same point, the centuries flowed past in all the coarseness of the first ages. The species was already old, and man remained a child.

If I have dwelt for so long on the hypothesis of this primitive condition, it is because, having ancient errors and inveterate prejudices to destroy, I thought I should dig right down to the root and, in a picture of the true state of nature, show how far inequality, even natural inequality, is from being as real and having as much influence in this state as our writers claim.

In fact, it is easy to see that among the differences that distinguish men, several are considered natural which are exclusively the work of habit and of the different ways of life men adopt in society. Thus, a sturdy or delicate temperament, along with the strength or weakness which stems from it, often come more from the rough or effeminate manner in which one has been raised than from the body's original constitution. It is the same with the forces of the mind. Education not only establishes a difference between cultivated minds and those that are not, but it increases the difference among the former group in proportion to their culture. For if a giant and a dwarf walk along the same route, each pace the two of them take will give a new advantage to the giant. Now, if we compare the prodigious diversity in the forms of education

and ways of life which prevail in the different orders of the civil state with the simplicity and uniformity of animal and savage life, where everyone feeds on the same foods, lives in the same manner, and does exactly the same things, we will understand how much the difference between man and man must be less in the state of nature than in society, and how much natural inequality must increase in the human species as a result of the inequality of institution.

But if nature, in the distribution of her gifts, were inclined to show as much preference as people claim, what advantage would the most favored have derived from that to the detriment of others in a state of things which does not admit of hardly any sort of relation between them? Where there is no love, what use will beauty serve? What is the use of intelligence for people who do not speak, and deception for those who have no dealings with others? I always hear it repeated that the strongest will oppress the weak. But let someone explain to me what they mean by this word *oppression*.

Some will dominate with violence; others will groan, enslaved to all their whims: that is precisely what I observe among us. But I do not see how that could be said of savage men, since it would be very difficult even to make them understand what *servitude* and *domination* are. One man will be readily able seize the fruits which someone else has gathered, the game he has killed, or the den that served as his refuge. But how will he ever succeed in making another man obey him, and what could be the chains of dependence among men who possess nothing? If someone chases me away from a tree, I leave it to go to another. If someone torments me in one place, who will stop me from moving on somewhere else? Is a man to be found whose strength is sufficiently superior to mine and who is, in addition, sufficiently depraved, sufficiently lazy, and sufficiently ferocious to compel me to provide his subsistence while he remains idle? He would have to resolve not to let me out of his sight for a single instant and to keep me bound with very great care while he slept, for fear I should escape or kill him. In other words, he is obliged to expose himself voluntarily to a great deal more trouble than he wishes to avoid and more than he gives me. After all that, does he relax his

vigilance momentarily? Does an unexpected noise make him turn his head? I take twenty paces into the forest, my chains are broken, and he does not see me again in his life.

Without needlessly prolonging these details, everyone should see that, since the bonds of servitude are not formed except by the mutual dependency of men and by the reciprocal needs which unite them, it is impossible to subjugate a man without previously putting him in a situation where he is unable to do without someone else. Since this condition does not exist in the state of nature, it leaves each man in it free of the yoke and voids the law of the strongest.

Now that I have proved that inequality is hardly perceptible in the state of nature and that its influence there is almost nothing, it remains for me to show its origin and its progress in the successive developments of the human mind. Having demonstrated that *perfectibility*, the social virtues, and the other faculties which natural man received in a potential form could never have developed on their own, that for this to happen they needed the fortuitous combination of several foreign causes, which might never have arisen and without which he would have lived forever in his primitive condition, I still have to consider and reconcile the different accidents which could have perfected human reason while degrading the species, made a being wicked while making him sociable, and from such a remote time finally led man and the world to the point where we see them.

I confess that since the events I have to describe could have come about in several ways, I am not able to choose except by conjecture. But apart from the fact that these conjectures become reasons when they are the most probable that can be derived from the nature of things and are the only means we can have for discovering the truth, the consequences I wish to deduce from mine will not, for that reason, be speculation; because on the principles that I have just established, one could not form any other system which does not provide

me with the same results and from which I could not draw the same conclusions.

This will spare me from expanding my reflections on how the lapse of time compensates for the small probability of events, about the surprising power of very slight causes when they are constantly at work, about the impossibility, on the one hand, of destroying certain hypotheses, even though, on the other hand, we cannot give them the certainty of facts about how, when two facts, given as true, are to be linked by a sequence of intermediate facts that are unknown or regarded as such, it is up to history, when one has it, to present the facts which link them and, when the history is absent, it is up to philosophy to determine similar facts which could link them; finally, about how, where the events are concerned, similarity reduces the facts to a much smaller number of different classes than one might imagine. It is sufficient for me to offer these things to the consideration of my judges; it is enough for me to have done so in such a way that ordinary readers have no need to consider them.

SECOND PART

The first man who, after enclosing a piece of land, got the idea of saying *This is mine* and found people simple enough to believe him was the true founder of civil society. What crimes, what wars, what murders, what miseries and horrors would someone have spared the human race by pulling out the stakes or filling in the ditch and crying out to his fellows, “Stop listening to this imposter. You are lost if you forget that the fruits of the land belong to everyone and the earth belongs to no one.” But it appears very likely that by this time things had already come to the point where they could no longer continue as they were. For this idea of property depends on many previous ideas that could only have arisen in succession and thus was not formed in the human mind all at once. A good deal of progress was necessary: men had to acquire significant industry and enlightenment, and transmit and increase them

from one era to the next, before arriving at this last stage in the state of nature. So let us take up these matters from the beginning and try to gather from a single perspective this slow sequence of events and knowledge in their most natural order.

Man's first sensation was that of his existence; his first care was his preservation. The productions of the earth provided him with all the help necessary. Instinct prompted him to make use of them. Hunger and other appetites made him try in turn various ways of life. There was one that urged him to perpetuate his species, and this blind impulse, lacking all heartfelt sentiment, produced only a purely animal act. The need satisfied, the two sexes no longer recognized each other, and even the child was nothing to the mother as soon as it could do without her.

Such was the condition of emerging man; such was the life of an animal limited at first to pure sensations, scarcely profiting from the gifts that nature offered him, and a long way from dreaming of wresting anything away from her. But difficulties soon presented themselves that he had to learn to overcome: the heights of trees which prevented him from reaching their fruits, the competition with animals who were seeking to eat these fruits, and the ferocity of those who wanted to take his life over them—everything required him to apply himself to exercising his body. He had to make himself agile, a fast runner, and vigorous in combat. Natural weapons—tree branches and stones—were soon found at hand. He learned to overcome natural obstacles, to fight other animals when necessary, to contend for his subsistence even with other men, or to compensate for what he had to cede to the stronger.

As the human race spread out, the difficulties multiplied with the men. Different terrains, climates, and seasons could force them to establish different ways of life. Some barren years, long harsh winters, and burning summers that consume everything demanded from them new industry. Along the sea and rivers, they invented line and hook and became fishermen and fish-eaters. In

the forests they made bows and arrows and became hunters and warriors. In cold countries, they covered themselves with the hides of beasts they had killed. Lightning, a volcano, or some fortunate accident gave them knowledge of fire, a new resource against the rigours of winter. They learned to preserve this element, then to reproduce it, and finally to use it for preparing meat, which heretofore they had devoured raw.

This repeated application of beings different from himself and from each other must have naturally engendered in man's mind perceptions of certain connections. Those relationships which we express by the words *large*, *small*, *strong*, *weak*, *fast*, *slow*, *fearful*, *bold*, and other similar ideas, which he compared when necessary and almost without thinking about it, finally produced in him some sort of reflection or rather a mechanical prudence which indicated to him the precautions most essential to his safety.

The new enlightenment that resulted from this development increased his superiority over other animals by making him aware of it. He practiced setting traps for them, he fooled them in a thousand ways, and although several surpassed him in their fighting strength or in running speed, over time he became the master of those that could serve him and the scourge of those that could harm him. That is why the first time he glanced at himself produced in him the initial stirring of pride, and why, when he still hardly knew how to distinguish ranks, he looked at himself as pre-eminent of his species and prepared himself from a great distance to make that claim as an individual.

Although his fellow men were not for him what they are for us, and he had hardly more interaction with them than with the other animals, they were not forgotten in his observations. After a while, he was able to observe conformities among them, his female, and himself. These made him judge those he did not perceive, and seeing that they all behaved as he would have done in similar circumstances, he concluded that their way of thinking and feeling was entirely similar to his own. This important truth, once firmly established in his mind, made him follow by a premonition as certain and

more rapid than rational logic the best rules of conduct which were appropriate to use with them for his own advantage and security.

Taught by experience that love of well-being is the only motive for human actions, he found himself in a position to distinguish the rare occasions when common interest should make him count on the assistance of his fellow men, and the even rarer times when competition should make him distrust them. In the first case, he joined up with them in a herd or at most in some sort of free association with obligations for none and which lasted only as long as the temporary need which had created it. In the second case, each man sought to secure his own advantage, whether by overt force, if he believed he could, or by skill and subtlety, if he felt himself the weaker.

That is how men were able imperceptibly to acquire some rough idea of mutual undertakings and of the advantage of fulfilling them, but only to the extent that present and perceptible interest could demand it. For looking ahead meant nothing to them, and, far from concerning themselves with a distant future, they did not think even about the next day. If it was a matter of catching a deer, each man sensed well that to do so he should keep his position faithfully. But if a hare happened to go past within reach of one of them, one can be sure he went after it without a scruple and, having caught his prey, cared very little about making his companions lose theirs.

It is easy to understand that this sort of interaction did not require a language much more sophisticated than that of crows or monkeys, who muster in groups in almost the same manner. Some inarticulate cries, lots of gestures and some imitative noises must have made up the universal language for a long time. Since in each country some articulated and agreed-upon signs were added to this, the establishment of which, as I have already said, is not very easy to explain, there were particular languages, but crude and imperfect ones, almost like those various savage nations still have today. Under the pressure of time passing, the profusion of things I have to say, and the almost imperceptible progress of the beginnings, I am racing through countless

centuries, for the more slowly the events succeeded one another, the more quickly they can be described.

At last these first advances made man capable of making more rapid ones. The more his mind was enlightened, the more his industry was perfected. Soon he ceased to sleep under the first tree or to withdraw into caverns. He made hatchets of some kind from hard, sharp stones which served to cut wood, dig the earth, and build huts out of branches, and he later got the idea of coating these with clay and mud. This was the age of a first revolution that led to the establishment and differentiation of families and introduced a form of property, from which perhaps even then arose many quarrels and fights. However, as the strongest were probably the first to make themselves lodgings they felt capable of defending, it is plausible that the weak ones found it quicker and safer to imitate them than to try to dislodge them. And as for those who already had huts, none of them could have had much inclination to take over his neighbor's, not so much because it did not belong to him as because it was useless to him, and because he could not have seized it without engaging in a very intense fight with the family that occupied it.

The first developments of the heart were the result of a new situation that united husbands and wives, fathers and children in one common dwelling. The habit of living together gave rise to the most tender feelings known to men: conjugal and paternal love. Each family became a small society, all the more unified since mutual attachment and freedom were its only bonds. It was then that arose the first difference in the ways of life of the two sexes, which up to this point had had only one. The women became more sedentary and grew accustomed to looking after the hut and the children, while the man went off to search for their common subsistence. In this way, through a slightly softer life, the two sexes began to lose something of their ferocity and vigor. But if each one separately became less suited for fighting savage beasts, on the other hand, it was easier to gather together to resist them in common.

In this new state, with a simple and solitary life, very limited needs, and the tools they had invented to provide for them, men enjoyed a great deal of leisure time and used it to produce for their own convenience several types of amenities unknown to their fathers. And that was the first yoke they unwittingly imposed on themselves and the first source of the evils they were preparing for their descendants. For, aside from the fact that in this way they continued to soften their bodies and minds, these amenities, through habit, lost almost all their charm and, at the same time, degenerated into real needs. It became much more cruel to lack them than sweet to possess them, and people were sad to lose them without being happy to own them.

Here we glimpse a little better how the use of speech was imperceptibly established or perfected within the bosom of each family, and it is possible to surmise once more how various particular causes could extend language and accelerate its progress by making it more necessary. Massive floods or earthquakes surrounded some inhabited regions with water or precipices. Revolutions of the earth broke off portions of the continent and split them up into islands. We can understand that among men brought together in this way and forced to live together, there must have formed a common idiom, more so than among those who wandered freely in the forests on the mainland. Thus, it is very possible that after their first attempts at navigation, some islanders brought among us the use of speech. And it is at least highly probable that society and languages originated in the islands and were perfected there before being known on the mainland.

Everything begins to change how it looked. Men who have thus far wandered in the woods, once they adopt a more stable settlement, slowly come together, are united in various bands, and finally form in each region a particular nation, unified in their customary traditions and characters, not by regulations and laws, but by the same way of life and diet and by the common influence of climate. A permanent settlement cannot fail to eventually create some connections among various families. The young people of different sexes live in neighboring huts, and the passing interaction that nature demands soon

leads, through time spent in each other's company, to another no less sweet and more permanent. People grow accustomed to considering different objects and to making comparisons. They imperceptibly acquire ideas of merit and beauty, which produce sentiments of preference. By dint of seeing one another, they can no longer go without seeing each other again. A tender and sweet sentiment insinuates itself into the heart, and at the least opposition turns into an impetuous rage: jealousy awakens with love; discord triumphs, and the gentlest of passions receives sacrifices of human blood.

As ideas and sentiments succeed one another and the mind and heart are drawn out, the human race continues to become domesticated, relationships expand, and bonds tighten. People became used to assembling in front of the huts or around a large tree. Singing and dancing, true children of love and leisure, became the amusement or rather the occupation of idle and congregated men and women. Each began to look at the others and to want to be looked at, and public esteem was valued. The one who sang or danced the best, the handsomest, the strongest, the most skillful, or the most eloquent became the most highly thought of, and that was the first step towards inequality and, at the same time, towards vice. From these first preferences were born, on the one hand, vanity and scorn and, on the other, shame and envy, and the fermentation brought about by these new leavens eventually produced compounds fatal to happiness and innocence.

As soon as men began to appreciate one another and the idea of respect was formed in their minds, everyone claimed to have a right to it, and failing to respect someone was no longer possible with impunity. From that emerged the first duties of civility, even among savages, and consequently deliberate wrong became an outrage, because, along with the harm resulting from the injury, the offended party often considered the contempt for his person more unbearable than the harm itself. And so, because each man punished the contempt which had been shown to him in a manner proportional to his own self-esteem, acts of vengeance became terrible, and men bloody and cruel. This is precisely the stage reached by the majority of savage peoples known to

us. And because several peoples have not sufficiently distinguished among ideas and observed how distant they already were from the first state of nature, they have rushed to conclude that man is naturally cruel and needs civil order to mollify him; whereas nothing is as gentle as he is in his primitive state, when, placed by nature at equal distances from the stupidity of beasts and the lethal enlightenment of civil man and equally limited by instinct and by reason to protecting himself from the harm which threatens him, he is restrained by natural pity from doing harm to anyone himself, since nothing inclines him to do so, not even after he has been harmed himself. For, according the axiom of the wise Locke, *There can be no injury where there is no property*.¹⁹

But it is necessary to remark that once society started and relationships among men were already established, different qualities were required in them from those that they retained from their primitive constitution. Morality began to introduce itself into human actions. Before there were laws, each man was the sole judge and avenger of the offences he had received, and thus the goodness suitable to the pure state of nature was no longer appropriate to emerging society. Punishments had to become more severe as opportunities to offend became more frequent, and the dread of vengeance had to replace the restraint of laws. Thus, although men had become less hardy and natural pity had already suffered some change, because this period in the development of human faculties held a clear middle position between the indolence of the primitive state and the petulant activity of our *amour propre*, it must have been the happiest and most durable epoch. The more we reflect on this, the more we find that this state was the least subject to revolutions and the best for man (Note 16) and that he must have emerged from it only through some fatal chance, which for the common utility should never have happened. The example of savages, almost all of them discovered at this stage, seems to confirm that the human race was made to remain in it forever, that this state is the true youth of the world, and that all later progress has looked like so many

¹⁹John Locke (1632-1704) was an enormously influential and important English philosopher. Rousseau quotes Locke from the French translation and substitutes *injury* for the word *injustice*.

steps towards the perfection of the individual but has, in reality, been towards the decrepitude of the species.

As long as men were content with their rustic huts, as long as they limited themselves to stitching their clothes of skin with thorns or fish bones, to adorn themselves with feathers and shells, to painting their bodies various colors, to perfecting or embellishing their bows and arrows, to carving some fishing canoes or crude musical instruments with sharp stones, in a word, as long as they did not occupy themselves except with tasks which one man could do by himself and to arts which did not require the collaboration of many hands, they lived free, healthy, good, and happy lives, as much as their nature enabled them to do so, and they continued to enjoy among themselves the pleasures of independent interaction. But from the moment a man had need of another's help, from the time they noticed that it was useful for one man alone to have provisions for two, equality disappeared, property was introduced, work became necessary, and the vast forests were transformed into smiling fields, which had to be watered with men's sweat and in which slavery and misery were soon seen sprouting up and growing along with the harvest.

Metallurgy and agriculture were the two arts whose invention produced this great revolution. For the poet, what has civilized men and ruined the human race is gold and silver; but for the philosopher it is iron and wheat. Both of these were unknown to the savages of America, who for that reason have always remained as they are. Other peoples even seem to have remained barbarous as long as they practiced one of these arts without the other. And perhaps one of the main reasons why Europe has been politically ordered, if not earlier, at least more continuously and better than the other parts of the world, is that it has been, at one and the same time, the most abundant in iron and the most fertile in wheat.

It is very difficult to conjecture how men came to know and use iron. For it is not believable that they came up on their own with the idea of extracting the raw material from the mine and giving it the necessary preparations for getting

it to fuse, before they knew what the result of that would be. On the other hand, we can attribute this discovery even less to some accidental fire, since mines are built only in dry places devoid of trees and plants, so that it appears nature had taken precautions to conceal this fatal secret from us. So the only thing left is that an extraordinary event, involving some volcano ejecting metallic materials in molten form, would have given observers the idea of imitating this natural operation. Even so, we must assume they had ample courage and foresight to undertake such a difficult task and to see from a considerable distance the advantages they could derive from it, something hardly appropriate even to minds already more trained than theirs must have been.

As for agriculture, its principles were known long before its practice was established, and it is scarcely possible that men who were constantly busy taking their subsistence from trees and plants did not relatively soon get an idea of the ways nature uses to grow plants. But their industry probably did not turn in this direction until a great deal later, either because the trees, which, along with hunting and fishing, provided their food, did not need their care, or because they did not know how to use wheat or had no tools to cultivate it, or because they lacked the foresight to think of future needs, or finally because they had no way of preventing others from taking away the fruits of their labor. Once they became more industrious, it is plausible that they began using sharp stones and pointed sticks to cultivate some vegetables or roots around their huts long before they knew how to prepare wheat and had the tools necessary for large-scale cultivation, to say nothing of the fact that, in order to devote oneself to this occupation and seed the earth, one must first resolve to give up something in order to gain a great deal later on; a way of anticipating things far removed from the frame of mind of savage man who, as I have said, has considerable trouble thinking in the morning about his evening needs.

The invention of other arts was thus necessary to force the human race to apply itself to the art of agriculture. As soon as men were needed to melt and

forge iron, other men were needed to feed them. The more the number of workers multiplied, the fewer hands were used to provide their common subsistence, without there being fewer mouths to consume it. And since some of them had to have foodstuffs in exchange for their iron, others finally discovered the secret of using iron to increase the production of food. From that was born, on the one hand, plowing and agriculture and, on the other, the art of working with metals and multiplying their uses.

From the cultivation of the land necessarily followed its division, and from property, once it became recognized, the first rules of justice. For in order to give each man what is his, it is necessary that each man have something. Furthermore, men began to direct their gaze into the future and, since all of them saw that they had some goods to lose, none need fear retaliation against himself for the wrongs he might do to others. This origin is all the more natural since it is impossible to conceive of the idea of property emerging from anything other than manual labor. For it is not clear what a man can add over and above his work in order to appropriate things he has not made. It is labour alone that gives the farmer the right to the products of the earth which he has worked on and hence gives him one to the land, at least until the harvest, and thus from year to year. Since that constitutes a continuous possession, it is easily transformed into property. When the ancients, says Grotius, gave Ceres the epithet of *legislatrix* and the name *Thesmophoria* to a festival celebrated in her honor, they let it be known by this action that the division of the earth produced a new kind of right, that is, the right of property, different from the right which results from natural law.²⁰

Once in this state, things could have remained equal, if the talents had been equal, and if, for instance, the use of iron and the consumption of foodstuffs had always remained in an exact balance. But the proportion, which nothing maintained, was soon broken. The strongest man did more of the work. The

²⁰Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) was a very famous Dutch jurist whose writings are considered the first definitive treatment in modern times of international law. Ceres is the Latin name for the Greek deity Demeter, goddess of the harvest. The Greek word *thesmophoros* means *law-giving*.

most skillful was better at turning his work to his own advantage. The most ingenious found ways to shorten his labor. The ploughman had a greater need for iron or the blacksmith for wheat, and, while both worked equally, one earned a great deal while the other had hardly enough to live. In this way, natural inequality imperceptibly spread, along with that of social arrangements, and the differences among men, developed by circumstances, become more perceptible and more permanent in their effects, and begin to have the same relative influence on the lot of individuals.

Once matters had reached this point, it is easy to imagine the rest. I will not pause to describe the successive inventions of the other arts, the progress of languages, the testing and use of talents, the inequality of fortunes, the use or abuse of riches, or all those details that follow these and which anyone can easily provide. I will limit myself merely to casting a glance at the human race situated in this new order of things.

There we are, then, with all our faculties developed, memory and imagination in play, *amour propre* involved, reason activated, and the mind almost at the limit of perfection. There we have all the natural qualities put into action, the rank and fate of each man established, not only on the basis of the quantity of goods and the power of helping or harming, but also on the basis of the mind, beauty, strength or skill, and merit or talents. Since these qualities were the only ones that could attract respect, it was soon necessary to have them or to affect them and, for one's own advantage, to show oneself as different from what one really was. Being and appearing became two entirely different things, and from this distinction emerged imposing pomp, deceitful cunning, and all their attendant vices. On the other hand, no matter how free and independent man had been previously, there he was, subjected by a multitude of new needs, to, as it were, all of nature and above all to his fellow men, to whom he has, in a sense, become a slave, even in becoming their master. If he is rich, he needs their services; if poor, he needs their help, and if of middling means, he is in no position to do without them. Thus, he must constantly seek to interest them in his lot and to make them discover a real or apparent

profit for themselves in working for his. This makes him deceitful and artificial with some men, imperious and harsh with others, and requires him to abuse all those he needs, when he cannot make them afraid of him and does not find it in his interest to serve them usefully. Finally, devouring ambition, the keen desire to raise his relative fortune, less from a real need than to set oneself above others, inspires in all men a dark tendency to inflict injuries on each other, a secret jealousy all the more dangerous because, in order to strike its blow in greater safety, it often assumes a mask of goodwill: in a word, competition and rivalry on the one hand, and opposing interest[s] on the other, and the constant hidden desire to make one's profit at the expense of others. All these evils are the first effects of property and the inseparable attendants of emerging inequality.

Before the signs that represent riches had been invented, wealth could scarcely have consisted of anything other than lands and livestock, the only real goods men could possess. But when inheritances had increased in number and extent to the point of covering the entire land, all adjoining one another, some could no longer grow except at the expense of others, and the people left over, whom weakness or indolence had prevented from acquiring an estate of their own, became poor without having lost anything, because, with everything changing around them, they alone had not changed and so were obliged to receive or to steal their subsistence from the hands of the rich. From that began to emerge, according to the different characters of one or the other, domination and servitude, or violence and plunder. The rich, for their part, had hardly learned about the pleasure of dominating than they soon disdained all others, and, making use of their old slaves to subject new ones, dreamed only of subjugating and enslaving their neighbors, like those ravenous wolves which, having once tasted human flesh, reject all other food and no longer want to devour anything but men.

In this way, when the most powerful or the most wretched used their strength or their needs to create a kind of right to the goods of others, equivalent, according to them, to the right of property, equality was fractured, and the

most horrific disorder followed. Thus, the usurpations of the rich, the thievery of the poor, and everyone's frantic passions snuffing out natural pity, and the still-feeble voice of justice, made men avaricious, ambitious, and wicked. Between the right of the strongest and the right of the first occupant there arose a perpetual conflict which ended only in fights and murders (Note 17). The emerging society turned to the most horrific state of war. The human race, debased and desolate, unable to retrace its steps or to renounce the unfortunate acquisitions it had made, and working only for its shame by abusing the faculties which honour it, brought itself to the verge of its ruin.

This strange disaster
fills him with dismay. For all his wealth,
he is a wretched man. He wants to flee
from all his riches and now despises
the very things he recently desired.²¹

It is impossible that men would not finally have reflected on such a miserable situation and the calamities devastating them. The rich, above all, must soon have felt how much a perpetual war worked to their disadvantage, where they alone paid all the costs and where, though the risk to life was common to all, they alone risked their property. Moreover, however they might have been able to colour their usurpations, they knew well enough that they were based only on a precarious and abusive right and that, since they had been acquired merely by force, force could take them away from them without their having a reason to complain. Even those who had been enriched by their industry alone could hardly base their property on better claims. They could well say, "I am the one who built this wall. I earned this land through my labor." "Who laid out its boundaries for you?" one could reply to them, "And by virtue of what do you claim to be paid at our expense for labour which we

²¹Rousseau's Latin quotation reads: *Attonitus novitate mali, divesque miserque,/ Effugere optat opes, et quoe modo voverat, odit.*" Ovid, *Metamorphoses* XI. Ovid is describing Midas who had been given by Apollo the power of turning all things he touched into gold.

did not impose on you? Do you not know that a multitude of your brothers are dying or suffering from a need for what you have in excess, and that you needed the express and unanimous consent of the human race in order to appropriate for yourself from the common subsistence everything over and above your own?" Lacking valid reasons to justify himself and sufficient strength to defend himself, easily crushing an individual, but himself crushed by gangs of bandits, alone against everyone and, because of mutual jealousies, unable to join with his equals against an enemy united by a common hope of pillage, the rich man, pressed by necessity, eventually thought of the best-conceived project that has ever entered the human mind: to use to his advantage the very forces of those who were attacking him, to turn his adversaries into his defenders, to inspire them with other maxims, and to give them other institutions that were as favorable to him as natural right was against him.

With this in mind, after showing his neighbours the horror of a situation which armed them all against the others, which made their possessions as onerous as their needs, and in which no one found his security either in poverty or in wealth, he easily came up with specious reasons to lead them to his goal. "Let us unite," he said to them, "to protect the weak from oppression, to restrain the ambitious, and to assure to each man the possession of what belongs to him. Let us set up rules of justice and peace to which everyone is obliged to conform, which do not exempt any one, and which in some way redress the whims of fortune, by subjecting the powerful and the weak equally to mutual obligations. In a word, instead of turning our forces against ourselves, let us collect them into one supreme power which governs us according to wise laws and which protects and defends all the members of the association, repels common enemies, and keeps us in eternal concord."

He required much less than the equivalent of this speech to convince crude and easily seduced men who, in addition, had too many things to unravel among themselves to be able to go without arbitrators and too much avarice and ambition to be able to do without masters for any length of time. They all

rushed headlong into their chains, believing they were ensuring their liberty. For although they had sufficient reason to sense the advantages of a political establishment, they did not have enough experience to foresee its dangers. Those most capable of anticipating the abuses were precisely the ones who counted on profiting from them, and even the wise ones saw that they had to resolve to sacrifice a part of their liberty in order to preserve the rest, as a wounded man has his arm cut off to save the rest of his body.

Such was, or must have been, the origin of society and of laws, which provided new shackles for the weak and new powers for the rich (Note 18), irretrievably destroyed natural liberty, secured forever the law of property and inequality, turned a clever usurpation into an irrevocable right, and for the profit of a few ambitious men henceforth subjected all the human race to labor, servitude, and misery. It is easy to see how the establishment of a single society made the establishment of all the others indispensable, and how, to stand up against united forces, it was necessary to unite in turn. Societies multiplied or extended themselves rapidly and soon covered the entire surface of the earth. It was no longer possible to find a single corner of the universe where one could free oneself from the yoke and duck out from under the often badly wielded sword which each man saw permanently suspended above his head. Since civil law thus became the common rule for citizens, the law of nature no longer had a place, except among the various societies, where, under the name of the [law of] nations, it was tempered with a few tacit conventions to make commerce possible and to take the place of natural fellow-feeling, which, by losing almost all the power between one society and another which it used to have between man and man, no longer is found anywhere, other than in some great cosmopolitan souls, who cross the imaginary barriers separating peoples and, following the example of the Sovereign Being who created them, embrace the entire human race in their benevolence.

Since the political bodies thus remained in a state of nature among themselves, they soon felt the disadvantages which had forced individuals to leave it, and

this condition became even more deadly among these large bodies than it had been previously among the individuals who comprised them. From that emerged national wars, battles, murders, reprisals that make nature tremble and shock reason, and all those horrible prejudices that rank the honour of shedding human blood among the virtues. The most decent people learned to count among their duties that of butchering their fellow men. Finally, men were seen massacring each other by the thousands without knowing why. And more murders were committed in a single day of fighting and more horrors in the capture of a single town than had been committed in the state of nature during entire centuries over the whole face of the earth. Such are the first effects one glimpses of the division of the human race into different societies. Let us go back to their founding.

I know that several people have provided other origins for political societies, such as conquests by the most powerful or the union of the weak. The choice among these causes is irrelevant to what I want to establish. However, the one I have just laid out seems to me the most natural for the following reasons: (1) Since in the first case the right of conquest is not a right, it could not have been the basis for any other right. The conqueror and the vanquished people constantly remain in a state of mutual warfare, unless the nation regains its full liberty and voluntarily chooses its conqueror as its leader. Up to that point, whatever capitulations have been made, since they were founded on nothing but violence and consequently are rendered null by that very fact, there cannot be with this hypothesis either a genuine society or a body politic or any law other than the law of the strongest. (2) In the second case, these words *strong* and *weak* are ambiguous. In the interval occurring between the establishment of the right of property or of the first occupant and that of political governments, the meaning of these terms is better rendered by the words *rich* and *poor*, because, in fact, before there were laws, a man had no way to subjugate his equals other than by attacking their goods or by giving them a part of his own. (3) Since the poor had nothing to lose but their liberty, it would have been very foolish of them to give away voluntarily the only benefit remaining to them without gaining anything in return. By

contrast, since the rich were, so to speak, sensitive about all aspects of their goods, it was much easier to harm them, and thus they would take more precautions to protect themselves. Finally, it is reasonable to believe that something has been invented by those to whom it is useful rather than by those it harms.

The newly emerging government did not have a constant and regular form. The lack of philosophy and experience enabled men to see only the present inconveniences, and they did not think of remedying others except as they arose. Despite all the work of the wisest lawgivers, the political state always remained imperfect, because it was almost a work of chance and because, since it began badly, time revealed its faults and suggested remedies, but could never repair the defects in the constitution. People constantly patched it up, whereas what was required was to begin by clearing the air and rejecting all the old materials, as Lycurgus did at Sparta, in order to raise a good structure later.²² At first, society consisted only of some general conventions that all the individuals committed themselves to observe and the community pledged itself to guarantee for each of them. Experience necessarily revealed how weak such a constitution was and how easy it was for lawbreakers to avoid conviction or punishment for wrongdoing where the public had to act as sole witness and judge. The law must have been evaded in a thousand ways, and the inconveniences and disorders must have continually multiplied, in order for people eventually to think of conferring on individuals the dangerous trust of public authority, and for them to commit to magistrates the task of making sure the decisions of the people were observed. For to say that leaders were chosen before the confederation was created—and that ministers of the laws existed before the laws themselves—is an assumption that does not warrant serious rebuttal.

It would be no more reasonable to believe that people were at first thrown into the arms of an absolute master, unconditionally and irrevocably, and that

²²Lycurgus was the legendary founder of the Spartan constitution (probably in the 7th century BC), a political arrangement that lasted for about two hundred years.

that the first way of providing communal security that proud and untamed men might have imagined was to hurl themselves into slavery. In fact, why did they give themselves superiors, unless it was to defend them against oppression and to protect their goods, their liberties, and their lives, which are, so to speak, the constituent elements of their being? Now, since in the relationships between man and man the worst that could happen to one was to see himself at the mercy of the other, would it not have been against good sense to begin by handing over to a leader the only things for whose preservation they required his help? What equivalent could he have offered them for conceding such a fine right? If he had dared to demand it under the pretext of defending them, would he not have immediately received the response of the old story: “What more will the enemy do to us?” It is thus indisputable, and the fundamental maxim of all political right, that the people gave themselves leaders to defend their liberty and not to enslave them. “If we have a prince,” said Pliny to Trajan, “it is so that he may protect us from having a master.”²³

Political writers produce the same sophistries about the love of liberty that philosophers have produced about the state of nature. On the basis of things they see, they judge very different matters which they have not seen, and they attribute to men a natural inclination to servitude because of the patience with which the men before their eyes endure theirs, without thinking that liberty is like innocence and virtue, whose value one does not feel except to the extent that one enjoys them oneself, and loses the taste for them as soon as they are lost. “I know the delights of your country,” said Brasidas to a satrap who was comparing the life of Sparta with that of Persepolis, “but you cannot know the pleasures of mine.”²⁴

²³Pliny the Younger (62-113 AD) was well known Roman politician and Trajan was Roman emperor (53-117 AD).

²⁴Brasidas was an important Spartan general in the 5th century BC. A satrap was a Persian official, Persepolis an important city in the Persian empire.

Just as an untamed stallion bristles his mane, paws the earth with his hoof, and struggles furiously at the very approach of a bit, while a trained horse patiently endures the whip and the spur, so barbarous man does not bend his head under the yoke which civilized man carries without a murmur, and he prefers the most stormy liberty to tranquil subjugation. Thus, we must not judge the natural dispositions of man for or against servitude by the degradation of enslaved people, but by the amazing things all free people have done to protect themselves against oppression. I know that the former do nothing but boast all the time about the peace and quiet they enjoy in their chains, and that *they call the most miserable slavery peace*, but when I see the latter sacrificing pleasures, rest, riches, power, and life itself to the preservation of the only good so disdained by those who have lost it, when I see animals born free and abhorring captivity smashing their heads against the bars of their prison, when I see multitudes of totally naked savages scorning European pleasures and enduring hunger, fire, sword, and death simply to preserve their independence, I feel that it is not appropriate for slaves to reason about freedom.²⁵

As for paternal authority, from which several people have derived absolute government and all of society, it is enough, without going back over the proofs to the contrary by Locke and Sidney, to observe that nothing in the world is further removed from the ferocious spirit of despotism than the gentleness of this authority, which considers more the advantage of the one who obeys than the benefit to the one who commands. By the law of nature the father is the master of the child only for as long as the father's help is necessary to him, and once beyond this term, they become equals. At that point the son, perfectly independent of his father, owes him only respect and not obedience. For gratitude is clearly a duty which should be done, but not a right that can be demanded. Instead of saying that civil society stems from paternal power, we should say the reverse, that this power draws its main strength from society: an individual was not recognized as the father of several

²⁵Rousseau's text quotes the Latin *miserrimam servitutem pacem appellant*, from the Roman historian Tacitus.

children until they remained gathered around him. The father's goods, of which he is truly the master, are the bonds which keep his children dependent on him, and he has the power to give them as a portion of his estate only as much as they have deserved from him by constant deference to his wishes. Now the subjects, far from having a similar favour to look forward to from their despot, given that they belong to him personally, both they and all they possess, or at least that is what he claims, are reduced to receiving as a favour what he leaves them of their own goods. He carries out justice when he robs them and shows them mercy when he lets them live.

Continuing to examine in this manner the facts in relation to Right, we would find no more solidity than truth in the voluntary establishment of a tyranny. It would be difficult to show the validity of a contract which would be binding on only one of the parties, in which everything would be placed on one side and nothing on the other, and which would turn out to the disadvantage only of the man who commits himself to it. Even today this odious system is very far from being that of wise and good monarchs, and above all of the kings of France, as we can see in various parts of their edicts and especially in the following passage from a famous edict published in 1667, in the name and by the orders of Louis XIV: "Let no one say, therefore, that the sovereign is not subject to the laws of his state, since the contrary proposition is a truth of the law of nations, which flattery has sometimes attacked, but which good princes have always defended as a tutelary divinity of their states. How much more legitimate is it to say with the wise Plato that the perfect happiness of a kingdom is that a prince is obeyed by his subjects, that the prince obeys the law, and that the law is right and always aims at the public good." I shall not stop to explore whether, since liberty is the most noble of man's faculties, it is not degrading his nature, putting him on the level of beasts enslaved by instinct, and offending even the Author of his being to renounce unreservedly the most precious of all His gifts, and to subject himself to committing all the crimes which He has forbidden us, in order to please a ferocious or insane master, and whether this Sublime Craftsman should be more angry to see his most beautiful work destroyed than to see

him dishonored. [I will overlook, if you wish, the authority of Barbeyrac, who states clearly, following Locke, that no one can sell his liberty to the extent of submitting himself to an arbitrary power which treats him as it pleases: “For,” he adds, “that would be selling his own life of which he not the master.”]²⁶ I will only ask by what right those who have not been afraid to debase themselves to this point could have subjected their posterity to the same ignominy, and renounced on its behalf goods which do not depend on their generosity and without which life itself is onerous to all those worthy of it?

Pufendorf says that just as one transfers one’s possessions to someone else by conventions and contracts, so one can also divest oneself of one’s liberty in favour of someone else. That, it seems to me, is extremely poor reasoning. For, first of all, the goods that I alienate become something totally foreign to me, and their abuse leaves me indifferent. But it is important to me that someone does not abuse my liberty, and I cannot, without making myself guilty of the evil that I will be forced to do, risk becoming the instrument of crime. Furthermore, given that the right of property is only a convention and a human institution, any man can dispose of what he possesses as he wishes. But it is not the same with the essential gifts of nature, such as life and freedom. Each man is permitted to enjoy these, and it is at least doubtful that he has the right to strip himself of them. In giving up one, he degrades his being; in giving up the other, he destroys his being as much as he can. And since no temporal good can compensate for one or the other, it would offend nature and reason at the same time to renounce them no matter what the price. But even if a man could alienate his freedom just as he can his possessions, it would be very different for children, who enjoy their father’s goods only by transmission of his right; whereas, liberty is a gift which they hold from nature in their capacity as human beings, and so their parents had no right to deprive them of it. Hence, just as it was necessary to treat nature with violence in order to establish slavery, so it was necessary to change nature

²⁶Jean Barbeyrac (1674–1744) was French jurist who wrote on international law.

to perpetuate this right. And the jurists who have solemnly pronounced that the child of a slave would be born a slave have decided in different terms that a human being would not be born a human being.

Thus, it appears certain to me not only that governments did not begin through arbitrary power, which is only their corruption and extreme limit and which leads them back finally to the single law of the strongest, for which they were initially the remedy, but also that, even if this is the way they did begin, such power, being by nature illegitimate, could not have served as the foundation for the rights of society and thus for institutional inequality.

Without entering today into investigations which still remain to be made on the nature of the fundamental pact of all governments, I am following common opinion and limiting myself to considering here the establishment of the body politic as a genuine contract between the people and the leaders it chooses for itself, a contract through which the two parties obligate themselves to observe laws that are stipulated in it and that form the bonds of their union. Since the people have, so far as social relations are concerned, united all their wills into a single will, all the articles on which this will is explicitly clear become as many fundamental laws which obligate all members of the state without exception. One of these laws regulates the selection and power of the magistrates charged with supervising the execution of the others. This power extends to everything that can maintain the constitution, without going to the point of changing it. To this are added honours that make the laws and their ministers worthy of respect, and for the latter some personal prerogatives which compensate them for the tiresome work a good administration demands. The magistrate, for his part, commits himself to use the power entrusted to him only according to the intention of the constituents, in order to keep each man in the peaceful enjoyment of what belongs to him and to prefer at all times the public utility to his own interest.

Before experience had demonstrated or knowledge of the human heart had enabled men to anticipate the inevitable abuses of such a constitution, it must

have appeared all the better because those who were charged with making sure it was preserved were themselves the most interested in doing so. For, given that the magistracy and its rights were established only on fundamental laws, as soon as the laws were destroyed, the magistrates would cease to be legitimate, and the people would no longer be bound to obey them. Since it was not the magistrate but the law that constituted the essence of the state, each man would by right return to his natural freedom.

The slightest attentive reflection would confirm this with new reasons, and by the nature of the contract one would see that it could not be irrevocable. For if there were no superior power which could guarantee the fidelity of the contracting parties or force them to fulfill their reciprocal commitments, the parties would remain sole judges in their own cause, and each of them would always have the right to renounce the contract, as soon as it found that the other was contravening the conditions, or those conditions ceased to suit it. It appears that the right to abdicate could be founded on this principle. Now, to consider, as we are doing, only the human institution: if the magistrate who has all the power in his hands and who appropriates all the advantages of the contract for himself, nevertheless had the right to renounce his authority, then there is an even stronger reason why the people, who pay for all the faults of their leaders, should have a right to renounce their dependence. But the horrific dissensions and the innumerable disorders which this dangerous power would necessarily bring with it show more than anything else how much human governments needed a more substantial basis than reason alone, and how much it was necessary to the public peace that Divine Will intervened to give sovereign authority a sacred and inviolable character which removes from the subjects the fatal right of disposing of it. If religion had achieved only this benefit for men, that would be enough to require them to cherish and adopt it, even with its abuses, because it spares even more blood than fanaticism causes to run. But let us follow the thread of our hypothesis.

The various forms of governments stem from the greater or lesser differences that existed among the individuals at the moment of their institution. Was one

man eminent in power, virtue, riches, or esteem? He was elected the only magistrate, and the state became a monarchy. If several men, more or less equal among themselves, prevailed over all the others, they were elected as a group, and an aristocracy was born. Those whose fortune or talents were less disproportionate and who were the least removed from the state of nature kept the supreme administration communal and formed a democracy. Time confirmed which of these forms was the most advantageous for men. Some remained subjected solely to the laws; others soon obeyed masters. Citizens wanted to keep their freedom; subjects thought of nothing but taking away that of their neighbors, since they could not bear that others were enjoying a benefit that they no longer enjoyed themselves. In a word, on one side were riches and conquests, on the other happiness and virtue.

In these various governments, all the magistrates were at first elected, and if wealth did not win out, preference was given to merit, which confers a natural pre-eminence, and to age, which provides experience in business and composure in deliberations. The Hebrew elders, the Gerontes in Sparta, the Senate in Rome, and even the etymology of our word *Seigneur* show how much old age was respected in earlier times.²⁷ The more the elections fell to men of advanced age, the more frequent these became, and the more problems made themselves felt. Intrigues were introduced, factions formed, parties grew embittered, civil wars broke out, finally the blood of citizens was sacrificed for the alleged happiness of the state, and people were on the verge of falling back into the anarchy of earlier times. The ambition of the leading men took advantage of these circumstances in order to perpetuate within their families their official positions. The people, already accustomed to dependence, repose, and the conveniences of life, and already beyond the state where they could break their chains, agreed to allow their servitude to increase in order to consolidate their tranquility. That is how the leaders became hereditary and grew accustomed to looking on their magistrate's office as a family possession, to considering themselves the proprietors of the

²⁷The French word *Seigneur*, meaning *Lord*, was derived from the Latin word for *older*. In Sparta the age of qualification for the senior council—the Gerontes—was sixty years.

state, in which at first they had been only officials, to call their fellow citizens their slaves, to counting them like livestock among the many things that belonged to them, and to calling themselves the equals of the gods and kings of kings.

If we follow the progress of inequality in these different revolutions, we will find that the establishment of law and the right of property was its first stage, the institution of the magistracy was the second, and the third and last was the transformation of legitimate power into arbitrary power, so that the condition of rich and poor was authorized by the first age, that of the powerful and the weak by the second, and that of master and slave by the third, which is the final degree of inequality and the limit to which all the others eventually lead, until new revolutions dissolve the government entirely or move it closer to a legitimate institution.

To understand the necessity of this progress we must consider, not so much the motives for the establishment of the body politic, as the form it takes in execution and the disadvantages it brings with it. For the vices that make social institutions necessary are the same that make their abuse inevitable. And since, with the sole exception of Sparta, where the law watched principally over the education of the children and where Lycurgus established moral traditions that almost did away with the need to add laws, laws in general are not as strong as the passions and keep men in check without changing them; it would be easy to prove that any government which, without being corrupted or altered, always worked exactly according to the purpose for which it had been established would have been instituted unnecessarily, and that a country where no one evaded the laws and abused the magistracy would need neither magistrates nor laws.

Political distinctions necessarily lead to civil distinctions. The growing inequality between the people and its leaders soon makes itself felt among individuals, and is modified in them in a thousand ways according to passions, talents, and events. The magistrate could not usurp illegitimate power without

creating some hangers-on to whom he is forced to cede part of it. Moreover, since citizens do not let themselves be oppressed except to the extent that they are led by blind ambition, and since they look more below than above them, domination becomes dearer to them than independence, and they consent to carry chains in order to be able to give them out in their turn. It is very difficult to reduce to obedience someone who does not seek to command, and the most adroit politician would not succeed in subjecting men who wished only to be free. But inequality spreads without difficulty among ambitious and cowardly souls, always ready to run the risks of fortune and to dominate or serve almost indifferently, according to whether it is favorable or unfavorable to them. That is why there had to come a time when the eyes of the people were so spellbound that their leaders only had to say to the most insignificant of men, "Be great, you and all your people," and immediately he appeared great to everyone, as well as in his own eyes, and his descendants were raised even more, in proportion to their distance from him. The more remote and uncertain the cause, the more the effect grew. The more loafers one could count in a family, the more illustrious it became.

If this were here the place to go into details, I would easily explain how inequality in credit and authority becomes inevitable among individuals even without the government getting involved] (Note 19) as soon as they are united in the same society and thus are forced to make comparisons among themselves and to take into account the differences they find in the continual use they must make of one another. These differences are of several kinds but, in general, since riches, nobility or rank, power, and personal merit are the principal distinctions by which people are measured in society, I would prove that the cooperation or the conflict of these various forces is the most certain indication of whether a state is well or badly constituted. I would show that among these four types of inequality, since personal qualities are the origin of all the others, wealth is the last to which they are finally reduced, because, given that it is the most immediately useful for one's well being and the easiest to pass on, men readily make use of it to buy all the rest. This observation enables us to judge with sufficient precision the extent to which each people is

removed from its original institution and how far it has gone along the road to the utmost stage of corruption. I would point out how much this universal desire for reputation, honors, and preferment, which devours us all, trains and compares talents and strengths, how much it excites and multiplies the passions, and, by turning all men into competitors, rivals, or rather enemies, and making so many contestants run the same course, how much it causes setbacks, successes, and catastrophes of all kinds every day. I would show that it is to this passionate desire to have oneself talked about, to this frantic urge to distinguish ourselves, which keeps us almost always outside ourselves, that we owe what is best and worst among men, our virtues and our vices, our sciences and our mistakes, our conquerors and our philosophers, that is, a multitude of bad things compared to a small number of good ones. Finally, I would prove that if one sees a handful of powerful and rich men at the peak of their greatness and fortune, while the crowd grovels in obscurity and misery, it is because the former value the things they enjoy only to the extent that the latter are deprived of them, and because, without changing their condition, they would cease to be happy if the people ceased to be wretched.

But these details alone would be material for a considerable work in which one weighed the advantages and the disadvantages of all governments relative to the rights of the state of nature, and where one would reveal all the different faces behind which inequality has shown itself up to the present time and will be able to show itself in future ages, depending on the nature of those governments and on the revolutions which time will necessarily bring about in them. We would see the multitude oppressed from within as a result of the very precautions that it had taken against what threatened it from outside. We would see oppression constantly growing without the oppressed ever being able to know what limits it would have or what legitimate means they had left to stop it. We would see the rights of citizens and national liberties gradually extinguished, and the objections of the weak treated as seditious murmurs. We would see politics restrict the honour of defending the common cause to a mercenary section of the people. From that we would see emerge the need for taxes, the discouraged farmer leaving his field, even during peacetime, and

abandoning the plough to gird on a sword. We would see deadly and bizarre rules arise about points of honor. We would see the defenders of the homeland sooner or later become its enemies, constantly holding a raised dagger over their fellow citizens, and there would come a time when we would hear them saying to the oppressor of their country: “If you order me to thrust a sword into my brother’s chest or into my father’s throat or into the womb of my pregnant wife, I will do all that, even though my right hand is unwilling.”²⁸

From the extreme inequality in conditions and fortunes, from the diversity of passions and talents, from useless arts, from pernicious arts, and from frivolous sciences would emerge mobs of prejudices, equally contrary to reason, happiness, and virtue. We would see the leaders fomenting everything that could weaken gathered men by disuniting them, everything that could give society an air of apparent harmony while sowing in it seeds of real division, everything that can inspire in the different orders a mutual distrust and hatred, by setting their rights and interests against each other and thus reinforcing the power that contains them all.

It is from the core of this disorder and of these revolutions that despotism, lifting by degrees its hideous head and devouring everything it had perceived as good and healthy in all sections of the state, would finally succeed in trampling over the laws and the people, and establishing itself on the ruins of the republic. The times preceding this last change would be periods of troubles and calamities, but by the end everything would be swallowed up by the monster, and peoples would no longer have leaders and laws, but only tyrants. From this instant, it would also cease to be a question of morals and virtue, for wherever despotism reigns, *in which there is no hope from*

²⁸Rousseau quotes the Latin lines “*Pectore si fratris gladium juguloque parentis/ Condere me jubeas, gravidæ que in viscera a partu/ Conjugis, invita peragam tamen omnia dextra,*” Lucan, *Pharsalia*.

honesty, it suffers no other master.²⁹ As soon as it speaks, one can consult neither probity nor duty, and the blindest obedience is the only virtue that remains for slaves.

This is the final stage of inequality and the extreme point that closes the circle and touches the point where we began. Here all individuals become equal again because they are nothing, and since the subjects no longer have any law other than the will of the master, and the master has no rule other than his passions, the notions of good and the principles of justice vanish once more. Here everything is reduced to the single law of the strongest and, as a result, to a new state of nature, different from the one with which we began, for the first one was the state of nature in its purity, and this last one is the fruit of an excess of corruption. In other respects, there is so little difference between these two states and the contract with the government is so dissolved by despotism, that the despot is master only as long as he is the strongest, and as soon as he can be expelled, he has no basis for protesting the violence. The uprising that ends by strangling or dethroning a sultan is an act as lawful as those by which, the previous day, he disposed of the lives and the goods of his subjects. Force alone preserved him, and force alone overturns him. Thus, everything occurs according to natural order, and whatever the outcome of these short and frequent revolutions may be, no one can complain of injustice from anyone, but only of his own imprudence or misfortune.

In this way, by discovering and following the forgotten and lost routes that must have led man from the natural state to the civil state, and by re-establishing, along with the intermediate stages which I have just noted, those which the pressures of time have made me suppress or which my imagination has not suggested to me, every attentive reader cannot but be struck by the immense gap which separates these two conditions. In this slow succession of things he will see the solution to an infinite number of problems of morality and politics that philosophers cannot resolve. He will appreciate that since the

²⁹Rousseau quotes the Latin *cui ex honesto nulla est spes*, a reworking of a line from the Roman historian Tacitus.

human race of one age is not the human race of another age, the reason Diogenes did not find a man³⁰ is that he was searching among his contemporaries for a man from an age that no longer existed. Cato, he will say, perished with Rome and liberty, because he was out of place in his century, and the greatest of men merely astonished the world he would have governed five hundred years earlier. In a word, he will explain how the human soul and passions, by imperceptibly altering, change their nature, as it were; why our needs and our pleasures change their objects over a long period of time; and why, as the original man disappears by degrees, society no longer offers to the eyes of a wise man anything other than an assembly of artificial men and factitious passions, which are the work of all these new relationships and have no true basis in nature. What reflection teaches us in this matter, observation confirms perfectly: savage man and civilized man are so different in the depths of their hearts and in their inclinations that what constitutes supreme happiness for one would reduce the other to despair. The former breathes nothing but repose and liberty; he wishes only to live and remain idle. Even the *ataraxia* of the Stoic does not come close to his profound indifference for all other objects.³¹ By contrast, the always-active citizen sweats, gets agitated, and frets all the time about finding even more laborious occupations. He works himself to death; he even runs towards it in order to put himself in a position to live, or he renounces his life to acquire immortality. He courts the great, whom he hates, and the wealthy, whom he despises. He spares nothing to obtain the honour of serving them. He boasts proudly of his low position and of their protection and, proud of his slavery, speaks with disdain of those who do not have the honour of sharing it. What a spectacle the wearisome and envied labours of a European minister would be for a native of the Caribbean! How many cruel deaths would this indolent savage not prefer to the horror of such a life, which often is not even

³⁰Diogenes, a Greek Cynic philosopher (c. 412– 323 BC), is reported to have spent his life looking for an honest man. Cato the Younger (95–46 BC) was an important Roman political figure, a staunch defender of the Republic.

³¹*Ataraxia* is a Greek word meaning *tranquillity*. For the Stoics the word meant absence of passion, a highly desirable state.

mitigated by the pleasure of doing good? But to understand the purpose of so many cares, the words *power* and *reputation* would have to have a meaning in his mind. He would have to learn that there is a type of man who counts the assessment of the rest of the universe as something and who knows how to be happy and content with himself on the basis of what other people say rather than on his own testimony. Such is, in fact, the real cause of all these differences: the savage lives in himself; social man, always outside himself, cannot live except in the opinion of others, and it is, so to speak, only from their judgment that he derives the feeling of his own existence. It is not part of my subject to show how from such a disposition emerges such a great indifference to good and evil, together with such pretty discourses on morality; how, with everything reducing itself to appearances, it all becomes artificial and for show—honor, friendship, virtue and often even vices, which we finally discover the secret of boasting about; how, in a word, by always asking others what we are and never daring to ask ourselves that question, in the middle of so much philosophy, humanity, politeness, and sublime maxims, we have only a deceptive and frivolous exterior, honour without virtue, reason without wisdom, and pleasure without happiness. It is sufficient for me to have proved that this is not man's original state and that it is only the spirit of society and the inequality it engenders that change and transform in this way all our natural inclinations.

I have tried to set out the origin and progress of inequality, the establishment and the abuse of political societies, as much as these matters can be deduced from the nature of man by the light of reason alone and independently of sacred dogmas that give to sovereign authority the sanction of divine right. It follows from this account that inequality, almost non-existent in a state of nature, derives its strength and growth from the development of our faculties and from the progress of the human mind, and finally becomes stable and legitimate through the establishment of property and laws. It follows further that moral inequality, authorized only by positive right, is contrary to natural right, whenever it is not in exact proportion with physical inequality, a distinction which demonstrates sufficiently what we should think in this

regard of the type of inequality which prevails among all civilized peoples, since it is manifestly against the law of nature, no matter how that is defined, for a child to give orders to an old man, for an imbecile to lead a wise man, and for a handful of men to stuff themselves with superfluities while the starving multitude lacks necessities.

ROUSSEAU'S NOTES

(1) Herodotus relates that after the murder of the false Smerdis, when the seven liberators of Persia gathered to discuss the form of government they would give the state, Otanes was strongly in favour of a republic. This opinion was all the more extraordinary from the mouth of a satrap, since, in addition to the claim which he could make to the empire, the great fear more than death a form of government which requires them to respect men. Otanes, as we can well imagine, was not listened to and, seeing that they were going to proceed to the election of a monarch, and not wishing to obey or to command, he willingly gave up his right to the crown to the other claimants, requesting as his total compensation that he and his posterity be free and independent. The others granted him this condition. If Herodotus had not told us of the restriction which was set on this privilege, it would be necessary to assume it. Otherwise, Otanes, not recognizing any sort of law and accountable to no one, would have been all-powerful in the state and stronger even than the king. But there was hardly any indication that a man who could remain content with such a privilege in a case like this was capable of abusing it. In fact, it seems that this right never caused the least trouble in the kingdom, either on the part of the wise Otanes or of any of his descendants.

(2) From the very beginning I have been relying with confidence on one of those authorities respected by philosophers because they are the product of firm and sublime reasoning, which only philosophers understand how to find and appreciate: "Whatever interest we have in knowing ourselves, I do not know whether we do not have a better understanding of everything that is

not us. Provided by nature with organs uniquely intended for our preservation, we use them only to take in exterior impressions; we seek only to spread ourselves without, and to exist outside ourselves. Too busy multiplying the functions of our senses and increasing the exterior range of our being, we rarely make use of that interior sense that reduces us to our true dimensions and separates us from everything that is not in us. However, if we wish to know ourselves, this is the sense we need to employ, the only one with which we are able to judge ourselves. But how do we activate this sense to its full extent? How do we free our soul, in which it resides, of all the illusions of our mind? We have lost the habit of using it. It has lived without exercise in the middle of the tumult of our corporeal sensations; it has been desiccated by the fire of our passions. The heart, the mind, the senses—they have all worked against it.” Buffon, *Histoire Naturelle*. Vol. 4, p. 151, *De la Nature de l’homme*.³²

(3) The changes which a long practice of moving on two feet could have produced in the structure of man, the relationships we still observe between his arms and the anterior limbs of quadrupeds, and the conclusion derived from their way of moving could have given rise to doubts about the way of walking that must have been most natural for us. All children begin by moving on four limbs and require our example and lessons from us to learn to stand upright. There are even some savage nations, like the Hottentots, who are very negligent with their children and leave them to move along on their hands for such a long time that later they have considerable difficulty getting them to stand straight. The children of the Caribbean peoples in the Antilles do the same. There are various examples of human quadrupeds. Among others I could cite that of the child who was found in 1344 near Hesse, where he had been raised by wolves, and who used to say later at the court of Prince Henry that, if it had been up to him alone, he would have preferred to return among them rather than live among men. He had acquired the habit of moving like these animals to such an extent that it was necessary to attach

³²A work by the celebrated French natural scientist Buffon, 1752.

pieces of wood to him that forced him to stand upright and balanced on his two feet. It was the same with the child found in 1694 in the forests of Lithuania, who lived among bears. He did not show, says M. de Condillac, any trace of reason, moved on his hands and feet, had no language, and made sounds quite unlike anything made by man. The little savage of Hanover, who was taken several years ago to the English court, had all the difficulty in the world forcing himself to walk on two feet. And in 1719 two other savages were found in the Pyrenees, who ran through the mountains like quadrupeds. With respect to the objection one could make that this deprives us of the use of our hands, from which we derive so many advantages, and apart from the fact that the example of monkeys demonstrates that the hands can be used very effectively in both ways, that would prove nothing except that man can give his limbs a more convenient purpose than their natural use, and not that nature intended man to move differently from what she teaches him to do.

But there are, it seems to me, much better reasons to put forward in order to assert that man is a biped. First of all, even if it were shown that at first he could have been structured differently from the way we see him and nonetheless could eventually become what he is, this would not be sufficient to conclude that that is what happened. For, after establishing the possibility of these changes, one would still have to demonstrate, before accepting them, that they were at least probable. In addition, the fact that the arms of a man appear to have been able to serve him as legs when necessary is the only observation in support of this system, in the face of a large number of others which oppose it. The main ones are as follows: if he moved on four feet, the way in which the human head is attached to the body, instead of directing his gaze horizontally, as in all the other animals and as it does in him when he moves upright, would have kept his eyes fixed directly on the ground, a position not very favorable for the preservation of the individual; the tail, which he lacks and does not need when moving on two feet, is useful for quadrupeds, and none of them is without one; a woman's breast is very well placed for a biped who is holding her child in her arms but is so inconveniently situated for a quadruped that none of them has it positioned in

this way; since the hindquarters are of an excessive height in proportion to the front limbs—which causes us when moving on all fours to crawl on our knees—the whole arrangement would have created a poorly proportioned animal that could not move easily; if he had set his feet as well as his hands down flat, he would have had in the posterior limb one less joint than the other animals, that is, the one which joins the cannon bone to the tibia, and by placing only the tip of his foot on the ground, as he would have undoubtedly been forced to do, the tarsus, not to mention the many bones which make it up, would appear too large to replace the cannon, and its articulations with the metatarsus and the tibia would be too compressed to give the human leg in this position the same flexibility as the legs of quadrupeds. The example of children taken at an age when natural forces have not yet developed and the limbs have not yet grown strong proves nothing at all. I could just as well claim that dogs are not intended to walk because they do nothing but crawl for some weeks after their birth. In addition, discrete facts have little force against the universal practice of all men, even of nations which, having had no communication with others, have not been able to imitate them in anything. A child abandoned in a forest before being able to walk and raised by some beast will have followed the example of his nurse by practicing how to walk like her. Habit could have given him abilities that he did not have naturally, and just as people lacking arms succeed by dint of practice in doing with their feet everything we do with our hands, he will eventually manage to use his hands as feet.

(4) If among my readers there is a scientist incompetent enough to make difficulties for me concerning this assumption that the earth is naturally fertile, I am going to answer him with the following passage:

“Since for their nourishment plants take much more material from air and water than they take from the earth, what happens when they rot is that they return to the earth more than they have drawn from it. Moreover, a forest retains rainwater by preventing evaporating. Thus, in a forest that has been preserved for a long time without being touched, the layer of earth that

provides vegetation would increase considerably. But animals return less to the earth than they take from it, and, since men consume enormous amounts of wood and plants for fire and other uses, it follows that the layer of soil that produces vegetation in an inhabited land must always grow smaller and finally become like the terrain of Arabia Petraea and so many other provinces in the East, which is, in fact, the area with the most ancient habitations, where one finds only salt and sand. For the fixed salt of plants and animals remains, while all the other parts vaporize.” M. de Buffon, *Histoire naturelle*.

To this we can add the factual evidence of the number of trees and plants of every species which fill almost all the deserted islands discovered in these last centuries, as well as what history teaches us about the immense forests which had to be felled all over the earth as it was populated or civilized. On this point I will make three more observations, as follows: First, if there is a sort of plant that could make up for the loss of vegetative material brought about, according to the reasoning of M. de Buffon, by animals, that is, more than anything, the forests of trees, whose tops and leaves gather and absorb more water and vapour than do the other plants; second, the destruction of the soil, that is to say, the loss of material suitable for vegetation, must accelerate proportionately the more the earth is cultivated and as the more industrious inhabitants consume its productions of every kind in greater amounts; my third and most important comment is that the fruits of trees provide animals with more abundant nourishment than other vegetation can, an experiment I made myself by comparing the production of two parcels of land equal in size and quality, one covered with chestnut trees and the other sown with wheat.

(5) Among quadrupeds, the two most universal distinguishing features of the carnivorous species are derived first, from the shape of the teeth, and second, from the structure of the intestines. The animals that live only on plants all have flat teeth, like the horse, the ox, the sheep, and the hare, but carnivorous animals have pointed teeth, like the cat, the dog, the wolf, and the fox. As for the intestines, the frugivorous animals have some, like the colon, not found in carnivorous animals. It seems, therefore, that man, who has teeth and

intestines like those in frugivorous animals, should naturally have been placed in this class. Not only do anatomical observations confirm this opinion, but the records of antiquity also strongly favour it. “Dicaearchus,” states St. Jerome, “reports in his books of Greek antiquities that under the reign of Saturn, when the earth was still fertile on its own, no man ate meat; instead they all lived on fruits and vegetables which grew naturally” (Book 2, *Adversus Jovinianum*). [This view can also be supported by what several modern travelers have reported. Francois Coreal, among others, states that most of the inhabitants of the Lucayes taken by the Spaniards to the islands of Cuba, Santo Domingo, and elsewhere, died from eating flesh.] One can see from this that I am overlooking a number of helpful points that I could put to good use. For since prey is almost the only thing carnivorous animals fight about and since the frugivores live with each other in continual peace, if the human species was in the latter category, it clearly would have found it a great deal easier to survive in the state of nature and have had much less need and far fewer occasions to leave it.

(6) All knowledge that requires reflection, all knowledge acquired only by linking ideas and perfected only in stages, seems to be completely beyond the grasp of savage man, for lack of communication with his fellows, that is to say, for lack of the tool used for this communication and of the needs that make it necessary. His knowledge and industry are limited to jumping, running, fighting, throwing stones, and climbing trees. But if these are the only things he knows, he makes up for it by knowing them much better than we do, who do not have the same need for them as he does. And since these activities depend entirely on physical exercise and cannot be communicated or improved from one individual to another, the first man could have been just as skilled at them as his last descendants.

The accounts of travellers are full of examples of the strength and the vigour of men among barbarous and savage nations, and the praise they give to their dexterity and agility is scarcely less. Since the only things people need to observe these things are eyes, nothing prevents us from accepting in good faith

what visual witnesses affirm in this matter. I draw some examples of this at random from the first books at hand.

“The Hottentots,” says Kolben, “have a better understanding of fishing than do the Europeans of the Cape. They are equally adept with nets, hooks, and spears, in bays as well as in rivers. They catch fish in their hands with no less ease. Their skill in swimming is incomparable. The way they swim is surprising and entirely unique to them. They swim with their bodies upright and their hands stretched out of the water, so that they look as if they are walking on land. When the sea is extremely rough and the waves are shaped like so many mountains, they somehow dance on the back of the waves, rising and falling like pieces of cork.”

“The Hottentots,” the same author continues, “are surprisingly skillful at hunting, and the nimbleness of their running is beyond imagination.” He is surprised that they do not put their agility to bad use more often, although that does happen with them sometimes, as we can judge from the example he gives: “A Dutch sailor disembarking at the Cape,” he says, “asked a Hottentot to follow him to town with a roll of tobacco weighing about twenty pounds. When the two of them were some distance from the group, the Hottentot asked the sailor if he knew how to run. ‘Run!’ replied the Dutchman, ‘yes, really well.’ ‘Let’s see,’ replied the African, and racing off with the tobacco he disappeared almost immediately. The sailor, amazed at his astonishing speed, did not think of chasing after him and never saw his tobacco or his porter again.

“They have such acute vision and such a sure hand that Europeans do not even come close to them. In throwing stones, they will hit a target the size of a halfpenny from a hundred paces, and what is more astonishing is that instead

of fixing their eyes on the target, the way we do, they move around making constant contortions. Their stone seems to be carried by an invisible hand.”³³

In discussing the savages of the Antilles, Father du Tertre says almost the same thing we have just read on the Hottentots from the Cape of Good Hope.³⁴ He praises above all their accuracy with arrows in shooting birds in flight and swimming fish, which they then catch by diving. The savages of North America are no less celebrated for their strength and skill. Here is an example that will enable us to judge these attributes in the Indians of South America.

In the year 1746, an Indian from Buenos Aires was condemned to the galleys in Cadiz. He proposed to the governor that he repurchase his freedom by risking his life in a public festival. He promised that he would attack the most ferocious bull all by himself without any weapon in his hand other than a rope, that he would wrestle it to the ground, seize it with his rope by whatever part people pointed to, saddle it, put a bridle on it, mount it, and then, riding on that bull, would fight against two more of the fiercest bulls which they let out of the *torillo*, and that he would kill them all one after the other the instant he was ordered to, without anyone’s help. His offer was accepted. The Indian kept his word and succeeded in everything he had promised. For information on the way he did that and on all the details of the fight, one can consult the first volume of *Observations sur l’histoire naturelle* by M. Gautier, page 262, from which these facts are taken.

(7) “The length of life of horses,” says M. de Buffon, “is, as in every other species of animals, proportional to the length of time they spend growing. Man takes fourteen years to grow and can live six or seven times as long, that is, ninety or one hundred years; the horse completes its growth in four years

³³Peter Kolben was a German astronomer who worked in the Cape of Good Hope from 1705 to 1713 and published a book in German in 1719 about the Hottentots. The book was translated into English in 1731.

³⁴Pere du Tertre, a French priest, wrote a history of the Antilles in 1667 based on his experiences there.

and can live six or seven times as long, that is, twenty-five or thirty years. The examples that could go against this rule are so rare that we should not even look upon them as exceptions from which we can draw conclusions. And just as big horses finish growing in less time than delicate ones, so they do not live as long and are old at the age of fifteen years.”

(8) I believe I see another difference between carnivorous and frugivorous animals, something even more general than the one I mentioned in Note 5, since this one includes birds. This difference consists in the number of the young, which never exceeds two in each litter for the species which live only on plants and which is usually greater than this number for carnivorous animals. It is easy to recognize nature’s purpose in this matter by the number of teats, which is only two in each female of the first group, like the mare, cow, goat, doe, ewe, and so on, and is always six or eight in the other females, like the bitch, cat, wolf, tigress, and so on. The hen, goose, and duck, which are all carnivorous birds, as well as the eagle, sparrow-hawk, and owl, also lay and hatch a large number of eggs, something which never happens with the pigeon, turtle dove, or birds, which eat absolutely nothing but grain. These rarely lay and hatch more than two eggs at a time. The reason we can give for this difference is that the animals which live only on grasses and plants spend almost the entire day feeding and are forced to spend a long time nourishing themselves; thus, they would not be capable of suckling several young. By contrast, the carnivorous animals eat their meals almost instantaneously and so can more easily and more frequently return to their young and to the hunt and make up for the loss of such a large quantity of milk. There would be many particular observations and reflections to make about all these matters, but this is not the place for them, and it is sufficient for me to have shown in this section the most general system of nature, a system that provides a new reason for taking man out of the class of carnivorous animals and setting him among the frugivorous species.

(9) A famous author, weighing the good and bad things of human life and comparing the two amounts, has found that the latter far surpassed the former

and that, all things considered, life was a rather poor gift for man. His conclusion does not surprise me: he drew all his arguments from the constitution of civil man. If he had gone back to natural man, we can imagine he would have come up with very different results: he would have noticed that man has hardly any ills other than those he has given himself and that nature would have been exonerated. It is not without effort that we have succeeded in making ourselves so unhappy. When, on the one hand, we consider the immense labours of men, so many sciences given depth, so many arts invented, so many forces used, chasms filled in, mountains flattened, rocks smashed, rivers made navigable, lands opened up, lakes excavated, marshes drained, enormous buildings erected on the earth, the sea covered with ships and sailors, and then, on the other, we investigate with a little meditation the true advantages which have resulted from all that for the happiness of the human species, we cannot fail to be struck by the astonishing disproportion that reigns in these matters and to deplore the blindness of man, which, to feed his insane pride and some kind of vain self-admiration, makes him run passionately after all the miseries to which he is susceptible, miseries that beneficent nature had taken care to keep from him.

Men are bad. Sad and continual experience removes the need for proof. However, man is naturally good. I believe I have demonstrated that. So what is it that could have corrupted him to this point, if not the changes which have arisen in his constitution, the progress he has made, and the knowledge he has acquired? Let us admire human society as much as we wish; it will be no less true that it necessarily leads men to hate each other to the extent their interests clash, to carry out apparently mutual services and, in fact, to do to each other all the bad things imaginable. What can we think of dealings where every individual's reason dictates to him maxims directly contrary to those which public reason preaches to the social body, and where each man profits from the misfortunes of others? There is perhaps not a single well-off man whose death his greedy heirs and often his own children do not secretly hope for, not a single ship at sea whose wreck would not be good news for some merchant, not a single business that a dishonest debtor would not desire to see

burn down along with all the papers it contains, not a single people which does not rejoice at the disasters of its neighbors. In this way do we benefit from the harm done to our fellow men, and one person's loss almost always makes someone else prosperous. But what is still more dangerous is that a great many individuals expect and hope for public disasters. Some want sicknesses, others death, others war, others famine. I have seen despicable men weeping with grief at the prospect of a year with bountiful harvests, and the great and fatal fire of London, which cost the lives or the goods of so many unfortunate people, perhaps made a fortune for more than ten thousand individuals. I know that Montaigne criticizes the Athenian Demades for having had a worker punished who, by selling coffins for a very high price, earned a great deal from the deaths of citizens. But since the reason Montaigne offers is that it would be necessary to punish everyone, his argument clearly confirms my own. Let us therefore look through our frivolous demonstrations of benevolence to what happens in the depths of our hearts, and let us reflect on what the condition of things must be where all men are forced to caress and to destroy each other, and where they are born enemies by duty and frauds by interest. If, in response, people tell me that society is so constituted that each man gains by serving others, I will reply that that would be all very well if he did not gain even more by injuring them. There is no legitimate profit which is not exceeded by what one can get illegitimately, and the wrong done to one's neighbour is always more lucrative than doing him favours. So it is merely a matter of finding ways to make sure of one's impunity, and for that the powerful use all their strength and the weak all their cunning.

When savage man has eaten, he is at peace with all nature and the friend of all his fellows. What if there is sometimes a quarrel over a meal? He never comes to blows over it without having previously compared the difficulty of prevailing with that of finding his subsistence elsewhere, and since his pride is not involved in the fight, it ends with a few punches. The winner eats, the loser goes to seek his fortune, and everything is peaceful. But with man in society, such quarrels are very different matters. It is primarily a matter of

providing what is necessary and then what is superfluous; then come the delicacies, then immense riches, then subjects, then slaves. He does not have a moment's rest. What is most remarkable is that the less natural and urgent his needs, the more his passions increase, and, what is worse, so does the power to satisfy them. As a result, after long periods of prosperity, after gobbling up many treasures and ruining many men, my hero will end up slitting every throat until he is the sole master of the universe. Such, in summary, is the moral picture, if not of human life, at least of the secret pretensions in the heart of every civilized man.

Compare without prejudice the state of civil man with that of savage man, and, setting aside civil man's malice, his needs, and his miseries, investigate, if you can, how many new doors he has opened to pain and death. If you consider the mental afflictions which consume us, the violent passions which exhaust and depress us, the excessive toil with which the poor are overburdened, the even more dangerous soft life to which the rich abandon themselves, things which make the former die from their needs and the latter from their excesses; if you think of the grotesque mixtures of foods, their pernicious seasonings, the corrupt provisions, the counterfeit drugs, the skullduggery of those who sell them, the mistakes of those who administer them, the poisoned containers in which they are prepared; if you consider the epidemic illnesses produced by the bad air among the hordes of people crowded together and the sicknesses brought about by the delicacy of our way of life, the moving back and forth from the interior of our houses into the open air, the use of clothing put on or removed with too little precaution, and all the cares which our excessive sensuality has turned into essential habits, whose neglect or lack then costs us our life or health; if you take into account the fires and earthquakes that engulf or overturn entire cities and kill off their inhabitants by the thousands—in short, if you add up the dangers which all these causes are continually gathering above our heads, you will sense how dearly nature makes us pay for the contempt we have shown for her lessons.

I will not repeat here what I have said elsewhere about war, but I wish that informed people wanted or dared for once to provide the public with details of the horrors committed in armies by contractors for provisions and for hospitals. We would see that their tactics, which are not very secret and thanks to which the most brilliant armies melt away into less than nothing, cause more soldiers to die than are cut down by enemy swords. It is no less astonishing to calculate the number of men the sea swallows every year, whether by hunger, or scurvy, or pirates, or fire, or shipwreck. It is clear that we must also credit established property, and therefore society, with the assassinations, poisonings, highway robberies, and even the punishments for these crimes. These punishments are necessary to prevent greater evils, but for the murder of one man, they cost the lives of two or more and thus, in effect, double the loss for the human species. How many shameful ways are there to prevent the birth of human beings and to cheat nature? It can be done by those brutal and depraved tastes that insult its most charming work, tastes which neither savages nor animals ever know and which emerge in civilized countries only from a corrupt imagination; or by those secret abortions, worthy fruits of debauchery and vicious honor, or by the exposure or slaughter of a multitude of children, victims of their parents' poverty or their mothers' barbarous shame; or, finally, by the mutilation of those unfortunate men for whom a part of their existence and all of their posterity are sacrificed to vain songs or, worse still, to the brutal jealousy of a few men, a mutilation which in this latter case is a double outrage to nature, both for the treatment received by those who suffer it and for the use to which they are destined.³⁵

[But are there not a thousand more frequent and even more dangerous cases where paternal rights overtly offend humanity? How many talents are buried and inclinations forced by fathers' imprudent constraints! How many men who would have distinguished themselves in an appropriate social position die miserable and dishonored in another position for which they had no taste! How many happy but unequal marriages have been broken or upset, and how

³⁵The "mutilation" Rousseau refers to is castration, used to produce male soprano singers and eunuchs for harems.

many chaste wives disgraced by these conditions of the social order, which permanently contradict the order of nature! How many other bizarre unions formed by interest and disavowed by love and reason! How many honest and virtuous married couples torment each other because they are badly matched! How many young and unhappy victims of their parents' greed hurl themselves into vice or spend their wretched days in tears and groan in the indissoluble bonds which the heart rejects and which have been made by gold alone! Fortunate sometimes are those women whose courage and even virtue tear them from life before barbaric violence drives them into crime or despair. Forgive me, my forever to be pitied father and mother. I regret embittering your sorrows, but may they serve as an eternal and terrible example to anyone who ventures, in the name of nature herself, to violate the most sacred of her rights!

If I have spoken only about those badly made unions which are the work of our civil society, should we believe that those where love and sympathy have presided are themselves without their disadvantages?]

What would it be like if I undertook to show the human species attacked at its very source and even in the most sacred of all bonds, where no one any longer dares to listen to nature until after he has consulted fortune and where, with civil disorder confusing virtues and vices, continence becomes a criminal precaution and the refusal to give life to a being like oneself a humanitarian act? But without tearing aside the veil covering so many horrors, let us be content to indicate the evil for which others must supply the remedy.

Let us add to all this the number of unhealthy trades which shorten men's days or destroy their constitution—such as working in the mines, the various ways of preparing metals and minerals, above all lead, copper, mercury, cobalt, arsenic, and realgar, and those other perilous occupations which every day cost the lives of a number of working men, some of them roofers, others carpenters, others masons, others quarry workers. Let us add up, I say, all these things, and we will be able to see in the establishment and perfection of

societies the reasons for the decrease in the species, which more than one philosopher has observed.

Luxury, impossible to guard against among men greedy for their own conveniences and for the esteem of others, soon completes the evil which societies have begun, and under the pretext of keeping the poor alive, which it should not have been necessary to do, impoverishes all the rest and sooner or later depopulates the state.

Luxury is a remedy far worse than the evil it claims to cure, or rather, it is itself the worst of all evils in whatever state, large or small. In order to feed the hordes of lackeys and miserable people it has created, luxury overwhelms and ruins the farmer and the city dweller. It is like those burning winds in the south that cover the grass and greenery with devouring insects and thus take away the subsistence of useful animals, and carry famine and death into all the places where they make themselves felt.

From society and the luxury it produces are born the liberal and mechanical arts, business, letters, and all those useless things that make industry flourish, enriching and destroying states. The reason for this decline is very simple. It is easy to see that by its nature agriculture must be the least lucrative of all the arts. Since its product is the most indispensably useful to all men, its price must be proportional to the resources of the poorest people. From the same principle we can derive this rule, that in general the arts are profitable in inverse proportion to their utility, and that the most necessary must finally become the most neglected. From that we see what we should think of the genuine advantages of industry and of the real effect its progress brings about.

Such are the perceptible causes of all the woes into which opulence finally hurls the most admired nations. As industry and the arts expand and flourish, the scorned farmer, burdened with taxes essential for maintaining luxury and condemned to spend his life between work and hunger, abandons his fields to go to the cities to seek the bread he ought to carry there. The more the stupid

eyes of people are struck with admiration for our capital cities, the more we will have to groan at the sight of abandoned fields, uncultivated land, and the major roads swamped with unfortunate citizens who have become beggars or thieves, destined one day to end their misery on the wheel or a dung heap. This is how the state enriches itself on the one hand, and grows weak and loses its population on the other, and how the most powerful monarchies, after a great deal of work to make themselves opulent and deserted, end up becoming the prey of poor nations that succumb to the fatal temptation to invade them and then, in their turn, make themselves wealthy and weak, until they themselves are invaded and destroyed by others.

For once let someone deign to clarify for us what could have produced those swarms of barbarians who inundated Europe, Asia, and Africa for so many centuries. Did they owe this immense population to the industry of their arts, to the wisdom of their laws, or to the excellence of their civil society? Let our learned men be so good as to tell us why, rather than multiplying to this point, these ferocious and brutal men, without enlightenment, without restraint, without education, did not all cut each other's throats at every moment in quarrels over their food or their hunting? Let them explain to us how these miserable men even had the audacity to look directly at such clever people as we were, with such excellent military discipline, such fine codes, and such wise laws. Finally, why, since society has perfected itself in the countries of the north and people have taken so much trouble to teach men their mutual duties and the art of living agreeably and peacefully together, does one no longer see coming from them anything like these multitudes of men, which it used to produce previously? I am quite afraid that someone may eventually get the idea of answering me that all these great things—namely, the arts, sciences, and laws—have been very wisely invented by men as a beneficial plague to check the excessive multiplication of the species, for fear that this world, which is intended for us, might finally become too small for its inhabitants.

What then? Is it necessary to destroy societies, eliminate *yours* and *mine*, and return to live in the forests with the bears? A conclusion in the style of my adversaries, one I prefer to anticipate rather than allow them the shame of drawing. O you, to whom the heavenly voice has not made itself heard and who do not recognize any purpose for your species other than to conclude this short life in peace, you who in the midst of cities can leave behind your fatal acquisitions, your restless minds, your corrupted hearts, and your frantic desires: since it depends on you, take back your ancient and first innocence. Go into the woods to lose the sight and memory of the crimes of your contemporaries, and do not be afraid that you are demeaning your species by renouncing its enlightenment in order to renounce its vices. As for men like me, whose passions have forever destroyed our original simplicity, who can no longer nourish themselves on grass and acorns, nor do without laws and leaders; those who were honored in their first father with supernatural lessons; those who will see in the intention of first giving to human actions a morality which they would not have acquired for a long time the reason for a precept indifferent in itself, and inexplicable in any other system: those people, in a word, who are convinced that the divine voice has called all the human race to the enlightenment and happiness of the celestial intelligences, all these will try, through exercising the virtues which they oblige themselves to practice as they learn to understand them, to deserve the eternal reward that they ought to expect from them. They will respect the sacred bonds of the societies of which they are members; they will love their fellow men and will serve them with all their power; they will scrupulously obey the laws and the men who are their authors and ministers; above all, they will honour the good and wise princes who will know how to prevent, cure, or mitigate this host of abuses and evils always ready to overwhelm us. They will inspire the zeal of these worthy leaders by showing them without fear and without flattery the greatness of their task and the strictness of their duty. But they will no less despise a constitution which cannot be maintained except with the help of so many respectable people, more often desired than found, and from which, despite all their cares, are always born more real calamities than apparent advantages.

(10) Among the men we know, either ourselves personally or from historians or travelers, some are black, others white, others red; some have long hair; others have only woolly curls; some are almost all hairy; others do not even have a beard. There used to be, and perhaps still are, nations of men of gigantic height, and, setting aside the fable of the pygmies, which could well be nothing but an exaggeration, we know that the Laplanders and especially the people in Greenland are far below a man's average height. The claim is even made that there are entire peoples who have tails like quadrupeds. Without putting blind faith in the stories of Herodotus and Ctesias, we can at least take from them this very probable opinion, that if people could have made good observations in those ancient times, when various peoples followed ways of life more different from each other than they are today, they would have also noticed many more striking varieties in the shape of the body and in physical habits.³⁶ All these facts, for which it is easy to provide incontestable proofs, can surprise only those who are accustomed to looking at nothing but the objects that surround them, and who are ignorant of the powerful effects of the diversity in climates, weather, nourishment, ways of life, general habits, and, above all, of the astonishing force of these very causes when they operate continuously over a long series of generations. Nowadays, when trade, travels, and conquests increasingly bring different peoples together and when their ways of life are constantly drawing closer to one another through frequent communication, we notice that certain national differences have diminished. For example, everyone can observe that the French today no longer have those large pale bodies and fair hair described by Latin historians, although time, along with the mixing of the Franks and Normans, who were themselves pale and fair-haired, should have re-established what interaction with the Romans could have taken away from the influence of the climate upon the natural constitution and complexion of the inhabitants. All these observations on the varieties which a thousand causes could produce and have, in fact, produced in the human species make me

³⁶Herodotus and Ctesias were ancient Greek historians in the fifth century BC.

question whether several animals similar to men, taken by travelers for beasts without much examination, either because of some differences they noticed in the external shape or merely because these animals did not speak, could not have been, in fact, real savage men, whose race, scattered ages ago in the woods, had no opportunity to develop any of its potential faculties, had not acquired any degree of perfection, and remained in the primitive state of nature. Let me give an example of what I mean:

“In the kingdom of the Congo,” says the translator of *L’Histoire des Voyages*, “we find a number of those large animals people in the East Indies call *orangutan*, which occupy something like a middle position between the human species and the baboons. Battel reports that in the forest of Mayomba, in the kingdom of Loango, one finds two kinds of monsters: the larger ones are called *pongos* and the others *enjokos*. The former resemble man exactly but are much stouter and very tall. They have a human face and very deep-set eyes. Their hands, cheeks, and ears have no hair, except for their eyebrows, which are extremely long. Although the rest of their body is quite hairy, the hair is not particularly thick, and its colour is brown. Finally, the only part that distinguishes them from men is their leg, which lacks a calf. They walk upright, with their hands gripping the hair on each other’s necks. They take refuge in the woods, sleep in trees, and make a kind of roof up there that keeps them covered from the rain. Their foods are fruit or wild nuts. They never eat meat. Negroes who move through the forest habitually light fires there during the night. They notice that in the morning, once they leave, the pongos take their place around the fire and do not leave until it is out. For with all their skill, they do not have sufficient sense to maintain the fire by bringing wood to it.”

“Sometimes they move in groups and kill the Negroes moving through the forests. They even fall upon elephants that come to graze in the places where they live and upset them by hitting them so hard with their fists or with sticks that they force them to run away bellowing. Pongoes are never taken alive, because they are so strong that ten men would not be enough to stop them.

But the Negroes capture a number of young ones after killing the mother, to whose body the little one clings tight. When one of these animals dies, the others cover its body with a pile of branches or leaves. Purchas adds that in his conversations with Battel he learned from him personally that a pongo had taken from him a small Negro who spent an entire month in the company of these animals³⁷. For they do no harm to men they come upon unexpectedly, at least when the men do not look at them, as the small Negro noticed. Battel did not describe the second species of monster.”

“Dapper confirms that the kingdom of the Congo is full of those animals that in the Indies are called orangutans, that is, dwellers in the woods, and which the Africans call *quojas-morros*.³⁸ This beast, he says, is so like man that some travelers have had the idea that it could be the issue of a woman and a monkey, a chimera that the Negroes themselves reject. One of these animals was taken from the Congo to Holland and presented to the Prince of Orange, Frederick Henry. It was as tall as a child at three years of age and of medium build, but square and well proportioned, extremely agile, and very lively. Its legs were thick and sturdy, and its entire body was bare in front but covered with black hair on the back. At first glance, its face looked like a man’s, but it had a flat, turned-up nose. Its ears were also those of the human species. Its breasts, for it was a female, were plump, its navel deep set, its shoulders very well articulated, its hands divided into fingers and thumbs, and its calves and heels thick and fleshy. It often moved upright on its legs and was capable of lifting and carrying fairly heavy loads. When it wanted to drink, it would take the lid of a pot in one hand and hold the bottom with the other. Afterwards it would gracefully wipe its lips. It lay down to sleep with its head on a cushion, covering itself with such dexterity that one would have taken it for a man in bed. The Negroes tell strange stories about this animal. They claim that it not only takes women and young girls by force but dares to attack armed men. In

³⁷ Battel was an English sailor who spent time in West Africa c. 1590; Samuel Purchass published an account of West Africa in 1613.

³⁸ Dapper was a Dutch explorer in Africa in the 1640’s. Father Jerom Merolla published his account of a voyage to West Africa c. 1682.

short, it seems readily apparent that it is the satyr of the ancients. Merolla is perhaps talking only about these animals when he recounts that the Negroes sometimes capture savage men and women in their hunts.”³⁹

There is more in third volume of the same *Histoire des Voyages* about these species of anthropomorphic animals under the name *beggos* and *madrills*. But to confine ourselves to the above accounts, we find in the description of these alleged monsters some striking similarities to the human species, and smaller differences than those one could establish between one man and another. We do not see in these passages the reasons why the authors refuse to give the animals in question the name *savage men*, but it is easy to guess that it is because of their stupidity and also because they did not speak, weak reasons for those who know that, although the organ for speech is natural to man, speech itself is not natural to him, and who know to just what extent his perfectibility could have raised civil man above his original state. The small number of lines that contain these descriptions enables us to judge how poorly these animals were observed, and with what prejudices they have been seen. For example, they are considered monsters, and yet people agree that they reproduce. In one place Battel says that the pongos kill the Negroes who cross through the forests; in another Purchas adds that they do not do them any harm, even when they take them by surprise, at least not when the Negroes make no attempt to look at them. The pongos gather around the fires lit by the Negroes when the latter move away, and go off in their turn when the fire has gone out. There you have the fact. Now here is the observer's comment: "For with all their skill, they lack sufficient sense to maintain the fire by bringing wood to it." I would like to work out how Battel or his compiler Purchas could have known that the pongos left the fire because of their stupidity rather than their will. In a climate like that of Loango, fire is not something very necessary to animals, and if the Negroes light them, it is less to fight the cold than to scare off ferocious beasts. It is thus quite simply the case that, after enjoying the flames for some time or growing quite warm,

³⁹ Jerome Merolla (c. 1650–c. 1710) was a missionary who wrote about his experiences in the Congo.

the pongos get bored of staying constantly in the same spot and go away to graze, an activity which demands more time than if they ate flesh. Moreover, we know that most animals, not excepting man, are naturally lazy, and that they refuse all sorts of care for themselves which is not absolutely necessary. Finally, it appears extremely strange that the pongos, whose dexterity and strength people praise, the pongos who know how to bury their dead and to make themselves roofs out of branches, do not understand how to push tinder into the fire. I remember watching a monkey carry out this same maneuver that these people want to claim the pongos cannot do. It is true that my ideas were not at that time focused on this subject, and so I myself committed the mistake for which I am criticizing our travelers: I neglected to examine if the monkey's intention was, in fact, to maintain the fire or simply, as I believe, to imitate the action of a man. Whatever the case, it has been well demonstrated that the monkey is not a variety of man, not only because it lacks the capacity to speak, but above all because it is certain that its species does not have the ability to perfect itself, which is the particular characteristic of the human species. Experiments do not seem to have been made on the pongo and the orangutan with sufficient care for us to be able to draw the same conclusion in their case. Nonetheless, there should be a way by which, if the orangutan or others were in the human species, even the crudest observers would be able to assure themselves, even with a demonstration; but apart from the fact that a single generation would not be sufficient for this experiment, such a test must be considered impractical, because what is only a supposition would have to be shown to be true, before the test to confirm the fact could be innocently attempted.

Judgments that are precipitous and not the fruit of enlightened reason tend to be excessive. Without any fuss our travellers made beasts with the names *pongos*, *mandrills*, and *orangutans*; from the same creatures the ancients made gods using the names *satyrs*, *fauns*, and *sylvans*. Perhaps after more precise investigations we will find that they are [neither beasts nor gods but] men. In the meantime, it seems to me that in this matter it is every bit as reasonable to rely on Merolla, an educated priest and a visual witness, who, for all his

naïveté, was an intelligent man, as it is to trust the merchant Battel, Dapper, Purchas, and the other compilers.

What judgment do people think observers like these would have made on the child found in 1694, whom I have already spoken about above and who gave no sign of reason, moved on his hands and legs, had no language, and formed sounds which were nothing like those of a man? It took a long time, continues the same philosopher who provided me with this fact, before he was capable of producing a few words, and he still did that in a barbarous manner. As soon as he could speak, he was questioned about his first state, but he remembered no more about it than we remember what happened to us in the cradle. If by some misfortune for him, this child had fallen into the hands of our travellers, there is no doubt that, after noticing his silence and stupidity, they would have been in favour of sending him back into the forests or shutting him up in a menagerie, after which they would have spoken knowledgeably about him in their splendid reports as a really curious beast that looked quite similar to man.

During the three or four hundred years the inhabitants of Europe have been flooding other parts of the world and constantly publishing new collections of travels and reports, I am convinced that the only men we know are Europeans. And from the ridiculous prejudices which have not been extinguished, not even among men of letters, it still seems that each one, under the grandiose name *study of man*, does hardly anything but study the men of his own country. Individuals may come and go but it appears philosophy does not travel. And so the philosophy of one people is not very suitable for another. The reason for this is obvious, at least for far-off countries: there are scarcely more than four kinds of men who undertake lengthy voyages—sailors, merchants, soldiers, and missionaries. Now, we should hardly expect that the first three groups would provide good observers, and as far as the members of the fourth are concerned, they would be busy with the sublime vocation that calls them, and even if they were not subject to social prejudices, like all the others, we would have to think they would

not willingly devote themselves to investigations which appear merely curious, and which would divert them from the more important tasks to which they are destined. Moreover, in order to preach the gospel effectively, nothing is required except zeal, and God gives the rest. But to study men requires talents that God does not promise to give to anyone, and that are not always shared by saints. In every travel book we open we find descriptions of characters and customs, but we are completely astonished to notice in them that these people who have described so many things have said only what everyone knew already, that at the other end of the world they have grasped only those things they could have observed without leaving their street, and that the true characteristics which distinguish nations and which strike eyes made to see have almost always escaped theirs. That is the origin of the fine moral saying, so tossed around by the philosophical crowd, that men are the same everywhere, and because they have the same passions and the same vices everywhere, it is rather pointless to seek to characterize different peoples, a line of reasoning about as good as if one said that we cannot distinguish Peter and James because both of them have a nose, mouth, and eyes.

Will we never see reborn those happy times when people did not get mixed up with philosophizing, but when men like Plato, Thales, and Pythagoras, gripped by a passionate desire to know, undertook the greatest voyages solely for the purpose of instructing themselves and went far away to shake off the yoke of national prejudices, to learn to understand men by their similarities and their differences, and to acquire that universal knowledge that is not knowledge of one century or of one country exclusively, but which, being of all times and of all places, is, as it were, the common science of the wise?

We admire the munificence of some curious men who have made or made possible at great expense voyages to the Orient with scholars and painters, so that they could sketch pictures of crumbling buildings and decipher or copy inscriptions, but I have difficulty conceiving how, in an age when people pride themselves on their fine knowledge, one cannot find two closely linked rich men, one financially rich and the other rich in genius, both with a love of

glory and a desire for immortality, one of whom would sacrifice twenty thousand crowns of his wealth and the other ten years of his life for a famous voyage around the world, in order to study, not always rocks and plants, but for once men and customs, and who, after so many centuries taken up with measuring and inspecting the house, finally got the idea of wanting to know the inhabitants.

When academicians have traveled through the northern parts of Europe and the southern regions of America, their purpose has been to visit more as geometers than as philosophers. However, since La Condamine and Maupertuis were both of these at once, we cannot consider the regions they saw and described as completely unknown. The jeweler Chardin, who traveled like Plato, has left nothing to say about Persia. China appears to have been well observed by the Jesuits. Kempfer provides a passable idea of the little he saw in Japan.⁴⁰ Apart from these accounts, we do not know the people of the East Indies, who have been visited solely by Europeans more intent on filling their purses than their heads. All of Africa and its numerous inhabitants, as remarkable for their character as for their color, remain to be studied. The entire earth is covered with nations we know nothing about except their names, and yet we make it our business to judge the human race! Suppose a Montesquieu, a Buffon, a Diderot, a Duclos, a d'Alembert, a Condillac, or men of that caliber, traveling to instruct their compatriots, observing and describing, in the way they know how to do, Turkey, Egypt, Barbary, the empire of Morocco, Guinea, the lands of the tribes in southern Africa, the interior and the east coast of Africa, the Malabars, Mongolia, the banks of the Ganges, the kingdoms of Siam, Pegu and Ava, China, Tartary, and especially Japan; then in the other hemisphere, Mexico, Peru, Chile, the lands of Magellan, not forgetting the Patagonias, true or false, Tucamen, if

⁴⁰La Condamine (1701-1774) was a French mathematician who traveled in Peru and was the first to write extensively about the Amazon River; Maupertuis (1698-1759) was a famous French mathematician who traveled in Peru; Jean Chardin or Sir John Chardin (1643-1714) was a French merchant who traveled extensively in Persia in 1673; Engelbert Kempfer (1651-1716) was a German who went with Dutch traders to Japan in the late 1600's. All of these wrote about their travels.

possible Paraguay, Brazil, finally the Caribbean, Florida, and all the savage countries, the most important voyage of all and one which would have to be undertaken with the greatest care. Suppose that these new Herculese returned from these memorable journeys, then at their leisure created a natural history, moral and political, of what they had seen. We would ourselves see a new world emerge from under their pens, and from this we would learn to understand our own. I say that when observers like these affirm that such and such an animal is a man and that another is a beast, we will have to believe them. But it would be extremely simplistic in this matter to rely on inaccurate travelers, about whom one is tempted sometimes to pose the same question they take it upon themselves to resolve concerning other animals.

(11) This appears to me to be absolutely obvious, and I cannot understand where our philosophers can find the source for all the passions they ascribe to natural man. With the sole exception of physical necessity, which nature herself demands, all our other needs are only those that arise from habit, before which they were not needs, or from our desires, and one does not desire what one is in no condition to know. From this it follows that since savage man desires only things that he knows and knows only things that are within his power to possess, or that are easy to acquire, nothing must be so tranquil as his soul and nothing so limited as his mind.

(12) In Locke's *Civil Government* I find an objection that appears to me too specious for me to be permitted to conceal it.

"The purpose of social interaction between the male and female," says this philosopher, "is not simply to procreate but to continue the species, and so this interaction must last, even after procreation, at least as long as is necessary for the nourishment and the preservation of the offspring, that is to say, until they are capable of supplying their needs themselves. We see that creatures inferior to man constantly and strictly observe this rule, which the infinite wisdom of the Creator has established for the works of His hands. In those animals which live on grass, the interaction between the male and female lasts

only as long as each act of copulation, because the mother's teats are sufficient to nourish the young until such time as they are capable of grazing on grass; thus, the male is content with begetting and does not involve himself after that with the female or with the young, to whose subsistence he can contribute nothing. But where beasts of prey are concerned, the interaction lasts longer, because the mother is unable to provide properly for her own subsistence and to nourish her young at the same time by means of her prey alone, for this way of feeding oneself is more laborious and more dangerous than feeding on grass. The assistance of the male is absolutely essential for the maintenance of their common family, if one may use this term, which cannot survive to the point where the young are able to go in search of prey except through the care of the male and female. One observes the same thing among all the birds, with the exception of some domestic ones that are found in places where the continual abundance of food exempts the male from the care of feeding the young. One sees that while the young in their nest require nourishment, the male and the female bring it there, until these young can fly and provide their own subsistence.

“And in that, I believe, consists the principal, if not the only, reason why the male and the female of humankind are obliged to a longer social interaction than the one that other creatures maintain. This reason is that the woman is capable of conceiving and is typically pregnant once again and producing a new child long before the earlier one is at the stage where it can do without the help of its parents and provide for its needs itself. In this way, a father is obliged to take care of those whom he has engendered and to continue that care for a long time: he also has an obligation to continue living in a conjugal association with the same woman with whom he had them and to remain in this relationship much longer than other creatures, among whom, because the young can survive on their own before the time for a new procreation arrives, the bond between male and female is broken on its own, and both find themselves completely free, until the season which customarily prompts animals to pair off requires them to choose new mates. And here we cannot admire enough the wisdom of the Creator, who, having given man the

qualities appropriate to providing for the future as well as for the present, wanted and saw to it that the social interaction of man and woman would last much longer than that of the male and the female among other creatures, so that in this way the industry of the man and woman would be more stimulated and their interests more unified, with a view to providing for their children and leaving them their goods, since nothing could be more prejudicial to children than an uncertain and vague union, or an easy and frequent dissolution, of conjugal society.”⁴¹

The same love of truth that has made me sincerely set down this objection prompts me to accompany it with some remarks, if not to refute it, at least to illuminate it.

1. I will first observe that moral proofs do not have much force in matters of physical science, and that they serve to provide reasons for existing facts rather than to establish the actual existence of these facts. Now, that is the kind of proof that Mr. Locke uses in the passage I have just cited. For although it could be advantageous for the human species that the union of the man and the woman be permanent, it does not follow that things have been established this way by nature; otherwise we would have to say that nature also instituted civil society, arts, commerce, and everything claimed to be useful to men.

2. I do not know where Mr. Locke discovered that among animals of prey, the interaction between the male and female lasts longer than among animals living on grass, and that one helps the other feed the young. For we do not see the male dog, cat, bear, or wolf acknowledging their female any more than the horse, ram, bull, stag, or all the other quadrupeds acknowledge theirs. On the contrary, it seems that, if the male’s assistance was necessary to the female in order to preserve the young, this would be above all in the species which lived only on grass, because the mother requires a great deal of time to graze, and during this whole period she is forced to neglect her litter; whereas,

⁴¹Rousseau quotes from the French translation of Locke, and the above passage is a translation of that text, rather than a direct quotation from Locke.

the prey of a female bear or wolf is devoured in an instant, and so she has more time to suckle her young without suffering from hunger. This reasoning is confirmed by an observation on the relative number of teats and young that distinguishes carnivorous from frugivorous species, a point I discussed in Note 8. If this observation is accurate and general, since the woman has only two teats and rarely has more than one child at a time, there is a powerful additional reason for doubting that the human species is naturally carnivorous. Hence, it seems that, in order to draw Locke's conclusion, we would have to turn his reasoning completely around. The same distinction applied to birds is no more reliable. For who will be persuaded that the union of male and female lasts longer among vultures and crows than among turtledoves? We have two species of domestic birds, the duck and the pigeon, that provide us with examples directly contrary to this author's system. The pigeon, which lives on nothing but grain, remains united with his female, and they feed their young together. The duck, whose voracity is well-known, does not recognize either his female or his young and does not help at all with their subsistence. Among chickens, a species hardly less carnivorous, we do not observe the rooster making any effort at all for the brood. And if in other species the male shares with the female the care of feeding the young, that is because birds, which cannot fly at first and which the mother cannot suckle, are far less able to do without the help of the father than are quadrupeds, for whom the mother's teat is sufficient, at least for a while.

3. There is considerable uncertainty about the main fact that serves as the basis for Mr. Locke's entire argument. For, in order to know if, as he claims, in a pure state of nature the woman is typically pregnant once again and producing a new child long before the previous one can provide for its needs by itself, we would require experiments that Locke certainly did not do and that no one is in a position to do. The continued cohabitation of husband and wife provides such an immediate opportunity for them to experience a new pregnancy that it is very difficult to believe that fortuitous meetings or the mere impulse of temperament produced these results as frequently in the pure state of nature as in conjugal society, a slow pace which would perhaps

contribute to making the children more robust and which, in addition, could be compensated for by an ability to conceive prolonged to an older age among women who would have abused it less during their youth. As far as children are concerned, there are a number of reasons for believing that their strength and their organs develop later among us than they did in the primitive condition I am talking about. The original weakness which they get from the constitution of their parents, the cares which are taken to wrap and constrain all their limbs, the tenderness with which they are raised, perhaps the use of milk other than their mother's—all these work against and delay in them the first progress of nature. The care they are required to give to a thousand things on which their attention is constantly fixed, without being given any exercise for their bodily strength, could again considerably hamper their growth, so that, if, instead of at first overloading and exhausting their minds in a thousand ways, we let them exercise their bodies with the continual movements which nature appears to demand of them, we can believe they would be capable of walking, being active, and providing for their own needs themselves much earlier.

4. Finally, Mr. Locke proves at most that there could well be in man a motive to remain attached to a woman when she has a child. But he in no way proves that he must have been attached to her before the delivery and during the nine months of the pregnancy. If a given woman is indifferent to the man during these nine months, if she has even become unknown to him, why will he assist her after the birth? Why will he help her raise a child which he does not even know belongs to him, and whose birth he did not decide upon or anticipate? Mr. Locke is evidently assuming what is in question. For it is not a matter of knowing why the man will remain attached to the woman after the birth, but why he will attach himself to her after conception. The appetite satisfied, the man has no more need for that particular woman, nor the woman for that particular man. He has not the least concern for and perhaps the least idea about the consequences of his action. One goes off in one direction, the other in another, and it is not clear that at the end of nine months they retain the memory of having known each other. For this sort of

memory by which one individual gives preference to another for the act of procreation demands, as I demonstrate in the text, more progress or corruption in the human understanding than one can assume it has in the condition of animality in question. Thus, another woman can satisfy the man's new desires just as easily as the one whom he has already known, and another man can satisfy the woman in the same way, assuming that she is motivated by the same desire during pregnancy, something we can reasonably doubt. If in the state of nature the woman no longer feels the passion of love after the conception of the child, the obstacles facing interaction with the man become much greater still, since she then has no further need either of the man who has impregnated her or of any other. There is thus in the man no reason to seek out the same woman, nor in the woman any reason to seek out the same man. Hence, Locke's reasoning collapses in ruins, and this philosopher's whole dialectic has not saved him from the mistake that Hobbes and others have committed. They had to explain a fact about the state of nature, that is, a state where men lived by themselves and where two particular men had no motive for living near one another, nor perhaps, even worse, did men have to live near other men. They did not think of taking themselves back before the centuries of society, in other words, before those times when men always have a reason to live close together, and where a given man often has reason to live near a particular man or woman

(13) I will take good care not to embark on the philosophical reflections one would need to make concerning the advantages and disadvantages of this institution of languages. It is not for me to be allowed to attack vulgar errors, and well-read people respect their prejudices too much to endure patiently my alleged paradoxes. So let us allow those people to speak for whom it has not been made a crime to sometimes dare to take the side of reason against the opinion of the multitude. *And nothing of the happiness of the human race would go away, if, when the trouble and confusion of so many languages have been dispensed with, mortals understood one art, and it would be permitted to explain anything by signs, motions, and gestures. But now, given the way things are, the condition of animals popularly believed to be brutes seems far*

*better than ours in this respect, since they signify their feeling and thoughts without an interpreter more readily and perhaps more aptly than any mortals can, particularly if they use a foreign language. Isaac Vossius, de Poëmatum Cantu & Viribis Rythmi, p. 66.*⁴²

(14) Plato, in demonstrating how much ideas of discrete quantity and its relationships are necessary in the least of the arts, mocks with reason the authors of his time who claimed that Palamedes had invented numbers at the siege of Troy, as if, says this philosopher, Agamemnon could not have known up to then how many legs he had. In fact, we know that it would have been impossible for society and the arts to have reached the stage they had already attained at the time of the siege of Troy had men not had the use of numbers and calculation. But the need to understand numbers before acquiring other knowledge does not make their invention easier to imagine. Once the names of the numbers are known, we can easily explain what they mean and bring out the ideas these names represent; but to invent them, one must, before conceiving these same ideas, be, as it were, familiar with philosophical meditations, trained in thinking about beings according to their essence alone, independently of all other perception, a very difficult and very metaphysical abstraction, scarcely natural, and yet without which these ideas could never have been carried from one species or genus to another, nor could numbers have become universal. A savage could have considered his right leg and his left leg separately, or looked at them together under the indivisible idea of a pair, without ever thinking he had two of them. For the representative idea that pictures an object for us is one thing, and the numerical idea that determines it is another. Even less could he have counted up to five, and although, by placing his hands against each other, he would have been able to notice that the fingers corresponded exactly, he was still very far from thinking

⁴²Rousseau quotes the following Latin: *Nec quidquam felicitati humani generis decederet, pulsa tot linguarum peste et confusione, unam artem callerent mortales, et signis, motibus, gestibusque licitum foret quidvis explicare. Nunc vero ita comparatum est, ut animalium quoe vulgo bruta creduntur, melior longe quam nostra hac in parte videatur conditio, ut pote quoe promptius et forsán felicius, sensus et cogitationes suas sine interprete significant, quam ulli queant mortales, proesertim si peregrino utantur sermone. Is. Vossius, de Poemat. Cant. et Viribus Rythmi, p.66.*

about their numerical equality. He did not know the number of his digits any more than number of his hairs, and if, once he was made to understand what numbers were, someone had told him that he had as many digits on his feet as on his hands, perhaps he would have been quite surprised, when he compared them, to discover that this was true.

(15) One must not confuse *amour propre* with *amour de soi-même*, two very different passions in their natures and in their effects. *Amour de soi-même* is a natural feeling that inclines every animal to see to its own preservation and which, guided in man by reason and modified by pity, produces humanity and virtue. *Amour propre* is only a relative feeling, factitious and born in society, which inclines each individual to be preoccupied with himself more than with anyone else, which inspires in men all the evils they do to each other, and which is the real source of honour.

Once this is well understood, I say that in our primitive condition, in the true state of nature, *amour propre* does not exist. For since each individual man looks at himself as the only spectator who observes him, as the only being in the universe who takes an interest in him, and as the only judge of his own merit, it is impossible that a sentiment that originates from comparisons, which he has no inclination to make, could spring up in his soul. For the same reason, this man could have neither hatred nor desire for vengeance, passions that can arise only from the feeling of some offense he has received. And since it is scorn or the intention to harm and not the evil itself that constitutes the offense, men who do not know either how to assess or to compare themselves can commit a great deal of violence against each other when there is some advantage to them in doing so, without ever offending each other. In a word, since each man hardly looks at his fellow men except in the way he would look at animals of a different species, he can carry off the prey of the weaker man or yield his to the stronger, without seeing these acts of plunder as anything other than natural events, without the least impulse of insolence or bitterness and without any passion other than the pain or joy at a good or a bad outcome.

(16) It is extremely remarkable that in all those years that Europeans have been eager to bring savages from various regions of the world into their way of life, they have still not been able to win over a single one of them, not even with the support of Christianity. For our missionaries have sometimes made them Christians, but never civilized men. Nothing can overcome the invincible repugnance they have against adopting our customs and living in our manner. If these poor savages are as wretched as people claim, by what inconceivable lack of judgment do they constantly refuse to civilize themselves by imitating us, or to learn how to live happily among us? By contrast, we read in a thousand places that Frenchmen and other Europeans have voluntarily taken refuge among these nations and spent their entire lives there, without being able to leave such a strange way of life. We even see sensible missionaries touchingly missing the calm and innocent days they spent among those despised peoples. If someone responds that these savages do not have enough enlightenment to judge soundly of their condition and ours, I will answer that evaluating happiness is less a matter of reason than of sentiment. Furthermore, this response could be turned against us with still more force. For there is a greater distance between our ideas and the mental disposition we would need to understand the taste which the savages have for their way of life, than between the savages' ideas and those which could make them understand the way we live. In fact, after a few observations it is easy for them to see that all our labours are directed at only two objectives; namely, at conveniences of life for ourselves and at respect from other people. But how are we to imagine the sort of pleasure a savage takes at spending his life alone in the middle of the woods, or fishing, or blowing on a badly-made flute, without ever knowing how to draw from it a single note and without taking the trouble to learn?

On several occasions people have brought savages to Paris, London, and other cities. They have been quick to display for them our luxuries, our riches, and all our most useful and most intriguing arts. All this has never aroused in them anything but a stupid admiration, without the least turn to covetousness.

Among others stories, I remember one about some North American chief who was brought to the English court some thirty years ago. They had a thousand articles paraded before his eyes in an attempt to find something that would please him as a gift, without discovering anything he appeared to care about. Our weapons seemed heavy and awkward to him, our shoes hurt his feet, and our clothes bothered him. He refused everything. Finally, they noticed that he took up a woolen blanket and seemed to get pleasure from wrapping it around his shoulders. "You will at least concede," someone said to him immediately, "the usefulness of this item?" "Yes," he replied, "it seems to me almost as good as an animal skin." And he would not have said even that if he had worn them both in the rain.

Perhaps I will be told that it is habit that, by attaching each person to his manner of life, prevents savages from sensing what is good in ours. If so, it must appear at least really extraordinary that habit has more power to maintain in savages a taste for their misery than in Europeans an enjoyment of their happiness. But to frame a response to this last objection to which one cannot offer a single word in reply, and without referring to all the young savages whom people have struggled in vain to civilize, without mentioning the Greenlanders and the inhabitants of Iceland whom they tried to raise and feed in Denmark, all of whom were killed off by sadness and despair, whether from listlessness or in the sea—where they attempted to swim back to their country—I will content myself with citing a single well-attested example, which I offer to admirers of European civilization for their consideration.

"All the efforts of the Dutch missionaries of the Cape of Good Hope have never been able to convert a single Hottentot. Van der Stel, governor of the Cape, took one of them in infancy and had him raised in the principles of the Christian religion and the practice of European habits. He was richly dressed, they had him learn several languages, and his progress responded extremely well to the cares people took with his education. The governor, who had high hopes for his mind, sent him to the Indies with a commissioner general, who employed him usefully in the affairs of the company. He came back to

the Cape after the commissioner's death. A few days after his return, while visiting some Hottentots in his family, he took it upon himself to strip off his European finery in order to clothe himself with a sheepskin. He returned to the fort in this new outfit, carrying a package containing his old clothes and, as he presented them to the governor, said the following to him:⁴³ "Have the goodness, sir, to pay attention to the fact that I am renouncing these clothes forever. I also renounce for all my life the Christian religion. My resolution is to live and die in the religion, manners, and customs of my ancestors. The only favor I ask of you is to leave me the necklace and cutlass I am wearing. I will keep them for love of you." Without waiting for Van der Stel's response, he immediately ran off in flight and they never saw him again at the Cape." *Histoire des Voyages*, Vol. 5, p. 175.

(17) One could object against me that in such a disorder, instead of stubbornly butchering each other, men would have scattered, if there were no limits to their dispersion. But, first of all, these boundaries would have to have been at least the limits of the world, and if we think about the excessive population that results from the state of nature, we will see that the earth in this condition would not have taken long to become covered with men thereby compelled to remain together. Moreover, they would have dispersed if the evil had been quick and the change something which happened from one day to the next. But they were born under the yoke. They were habituated to bearing it when they felt its weight, and they were content to wait for the opportunity to shake it off. Finally, already accustomed to the thousands of conveniences which forced them to remain together, scattering was no longer as easy as in the first days, when no one had a need for anything except himself, and each of them decided what to do without waiting for another's consent.

(18) Marshal de V*** used to tell the story that in one of his campaigns, when the excessive corrupt dealing of one of the contractors for provisions made the army suffer and grumble, he scolded him sharply and threatened to have him

⁴³ [Rousseau's note:] See the frontispiece.

hanged. “This threat does not concern me,” the scoundrel brazenly answered him, “and I am very pleased to tell you that they don’t hang a man who has at his disposal a hundred thousand crowns.” “I don’t know how that came about,” the marshal added naively, “but in fact he was not hanged, although he deserved it a hundred times over.”

(19) Distributive justice would still be against this strict equality in the state of nature, even if it were practicable in civil society. And since all the members of the state owe it their services in proportion to their talents and their strengths, the citizens, in their turn, should be distinguished and favored in proportion to their services. It is in this sense that we must understand a passage of Isocrates, where he praises the first Athenians for having well understood how to distinguish the more advantageous of the two sorts of equality: one which consists of dividing the same advantages indifferently among all the citizens, and the other of distributing them according to individual merit. These skillful politicians, the orator adds, banned that unjust equality which establishes no difference between good and bad men, and cleaved themselves inviolably to the one that rewards and punishes each according to his merit. But, first of all, there has never existed a society, no matter what degree of corruption it might have reached, in which people make no distinction between good and bad men. And in the matter of morals, where the law cannot establish a measurement sufficiently precise to serve as a rule for the magistrate, it very wisely—in order not to leave the fate or the rank of the citizens to the discretion of the magistrate—forbids him from judging persons and allows him to judge nothing but actions. There are no morals so pure that they can endure censors, other than those of the ancient Romans, and similar tribunals would soon have upset everything among us. It is up to public esteem to establish the difference between bad and good people; the magistrate judges only matters of explicit law. But the people are the true judge of morality, a judge of integrity and even enlightenment in this matter, one who is sometimes misled but never corrupted. The ranks of the citizens thus ought to be regulated, not on the basis of their personal merit, which would allow the magistrate a way of making an almost arbitrary

application of the law, but on the basis of the real services they render the state, which are amenable to a more exact assessment.